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# Illinois Issues

*A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield*

## The two faces of Illinois politics



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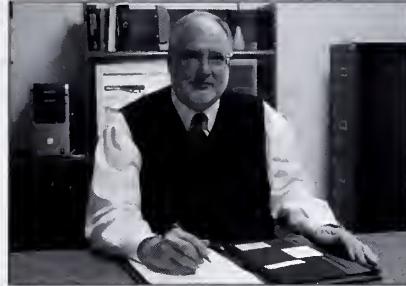
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Diana Steffel



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"If it isn't the most corrupt state in the United States, it's certainly one hell of a competitor. Even the most cynical agents in our office were shocked."

He wasn't trying to be funny. He was deadly serious. And he was dead on.

"Shocked" was the word Grant used, and he meant it in its intended sense. But I've also heard that word used numerous times — when discussion turns to the misdeeds of some Illinois politician — in the sense uttered by the corrupt Louis Renault in *Casablanca*.

they've developed an immunity to shock when it comes to Illinois' culture of political corruption.

And it's not just Blagojevich and Ryan. The history is long. There's no point in repeating it here. We all already know it, anyway. Yet we toss it off with



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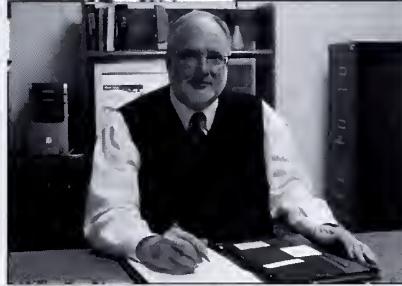


## *Illinois Issues*

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD  
PO Box 19243  
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Dana Heupel



## The arrest of Gov. Blagojevich calls for immediate, drastic, ruthless reform

by Dana Heupel

**O**K, this isn't funny anymore. No more jokes about dead people voting in Chicago. No more bumper stickers that proclaim, "Our governor's more corrupt than your governor." No more resigned acceptance — even twisted pride — when it comes to Illinois' crooked politicians.

No, we're not in competition with New Jersey. (No more New Jersey jokes, either.)

The arrest of Gov. Rod Blagojevich calls for immediate, drastic, ruthless reform. It's not just time for a tune-up, or even a major overhaul. It's time to tow the malfunctioning old jalopy to the junkyard and crush it until it's unrecognizable and no part can be salvaged for use later on.

Overreacting a bit, you say? You heard the words that Robert Grant, head of the FBI's Chicago office, used during the press conference announcing Blagojevich's arrest:

"If it isn't the most corrupt state in the United States, it's certainly one hell of a competitor. Even the most cynical agents in our office were shocked."

He wasn't trying to be funny. He was deadly serious. And he was dead on.

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*It's not just time for a tune-up, or even a major overhaul. It's time to tow the malfunctioning old jalopy to the junkyard and crush it until it's unrecognizable and no part can be salvaged for use later on.*

Rod Blagojevich, you remember, was the Democratic reformer we elected — and later re-elected — in the wake of Republican Gov. George Ryan's corrupt regime. Illinois has officially now become a laughing-stock. And it still isn't funny.

"Shocked" was the word Grant used, and he meant it in its intended sense. But I've also heard that word used numerous times — when discussion turns to the misdeeds of some Illinois politician — in the sense uttered by the corrupt Louis Renault in *Casablanca*.

"I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here," the police captain played by Claude Raines tells Humphrey Bogart, the proprietor of Rick's Café Américain, when the Nazis order Renault to shutter the nightclub. Renault then turns away to collect his gambling winnings from a café employee.

We might have been shocked by Blagojevich's brazen words, captured by secret recording devices. But were we really shocked that he was trading away his public trust for campaign contributions or personal gain? Or were we simply "shocked, shocked" like Renault?

It has been widely reported for years that Blagojevich began muscling contractors and political appointees for campaign contributions soon after he took office. Still, he was re-elected in 2006. You can't argue that voters were uninformed; you can only figure that they've developed an immunity to shock when it comes to Illinois' culture of political corruption.

And it's not just Blagojevich and Ryan. The history is long. There's no point in repeating it here. We all already know it, anyway. Yet we toss it off with

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some variation of the quotation by former German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck: "The less people know about how sausages and laws are made, the better they will sleep at night."

No more jokes about sausage. Those aren't funny anymore, either.

"It's always about money," another well-known cynical retort goes. But that's certainly true in this case. Although court documents filed in Blagojevich's arrest delve some into his allegedly trying to leverage Barack Obama's vacated Senate seat to weasel a job for himself or his wife, the bulk of the charges involve his unquenchable thirst for campaign contributions.

In the last election, Blagojevich dipped into his ill-gotten campaign piggy bank for nearly \$20 million to fuel his advertising firestorm that ultimately persuaded voters to re-elect him despite the well-known federal investigation into his fundraising tactics.

The leaders of the four legislative caucuses also control vast political funds, a main reason why their opinions are really the only ones that count in the General Assembly.

And the investigation that landed former Gov. George Ryan in prison began because his staff strong-armed workers at driver service centers to raise large sums of campaign money — which many accomplished through accepting bribes.

We have to guarantee that those transgressions never, ever happen again. The first step toward mending the state's shabby reputation is to enact the toughest campaign finance and governmental ethics laws in the country.

Those could include such reforms as:

- Strict limits on campaign contributions from individuals, corporations or political action committees. Federal limits on individuals are \$2,300 per candidate per election and up to \$5,000 for PACs. Corporations and labor organizations are forbidden from contributing but can establish PACs.

- An absolute ban on campaign con-

tributions from state contractors or employees. Federal contractors cannot donate directly to federal campaigns.

- Term limits for statewide elected officials. If two terms is enough for the president of the United States, it is enough for a governor.

- No more waivers of the state's revolving door law, which prevents state government workers from lobbying their former agencies for a year after they leave their jobs.

- Independent ethics investigators. The state ethics committees now in place cannot initiate investigations without a formal complaint, and most of their work and findings are conducted in complete secrecy.

Of course, the only way to enact strong laws is through the politicians who will be bound by them. They will argue that corrupt individuals will find ways to skirt any law, no matter how tough. But in the end, that's simply an argument to do nothing.

More important than strict laws, however — and probably the best way to polish away the tarnish on Illinois state government — is for Illinoisans to no longer tolerate corrupt politicians. We have to get it into our heads that it's no longer fashionable — or funny — to be crooked.

Maybe Illinois voters will finally become so embarrassed by the worldwide condemnation of Blagojevich's alleged actions that we'll place character and integrity atop of our list of qualifications to serve in public office.

Maybe we in the world-weary news media will refrain from writing and broadcasting stories and columns about "da pols" and their adorable penchant for mischief and thievery.

And maybe even more of "da pols" themselves will finally recognize for certain that when they place their self-interests above the concerns of those who elected them, they will go to prison for a while and become pariahs for life. Perhaps we'll even attract more candidates with ethical values and principles.

Now wouldn't that be funny. □

*Dana Heupel can be reached at heupel.dana@uis.edu.*

# Illinois Issues

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January 2009

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Photograph courtesy of the Chicago Sun-Times, by John White



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*Bethany Jaeger*



## Gov. Rod Blagojevich left a mess

by Bethany Jaeger

Illinois has become a joke after Gov. Rod Blagojevich's December 9 arrest.

The national media flew in like hawks hunting prey for the 24-hour news cycle. They interviewed Illinois lawmakers and commented on how strange the situation had become, particularly for the state that produced the next U.S. president.

A case in point is CNN's headline the day after the governor's arrest: "Illinois state politics read more like a script from 'The Sopranos' than a page out of the history books."

But Illinois' reputation isn't the worst of its problems. After the national attention fixates on something else, legislators will face the aftermath of a governor who used retribution to decide public policy. The impeachment proceedings could further distract from the legislature's role to conduct business on behalf of its people.

"It makes it much more difficult, and, quite obviously, there's the possibility that this impeachment inquiry will overshadow the entire session," said House Speaker Michael Madigan the day the legislature formed a committee to investigate cause for impeachment.

Both Madigan and House Minority Leader Tom Cross emphasized swift but fair action, ensuring that the process protects the governor's constitutional rights.

Until Blagojevich is out of office, however, the state cannot fully function.

"The state's going to be on hold,"

*Numerous policy decisions remain in limbo: the \$4 billion in unpaid bills, the closing of state parks and historic sites, the shuttering of a state prison, the transfer of transportation jobs and the expansion of a health care program.*

Cross said during a Statehouse news conference the day the impeachment inquiry began. "And all those issues that we're concerned about — whether it's short-term borrowing, whether it's next year's budget, whether it's an infrastructure bill, how we're going to spend money if we get money from the federal government — all that is going to be on hold."

In fact, since Blagojevich's arrest, numerous policy decisions remain in limbo: the \$4 billion in unpaid bills; the closing of state parks and historic sites; the shuttering of a state prison; the transfer of a transportation division and the expansion of a health care program. Each delay affects average citizens who rely on state services.

Blagojevich, Comptroller Dan Hynes and Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias agreed

to borrow the \$1.4 billion to pay service providers before Christmas, but the governor's arrest complicated and delayed the approval process.

Carol Knowles, spokeswoman for Hynes, says if the state can't pay its bills, the ramifications will continue to spread throughout daily life. "It means that payment delays will continue even longer than they are, which means that the state will be paying additional money in interest to all the vendors who are awaiting payment. And if you're a vendor, it could be catastrophic and mean that you're going out of business if you depend on the state of Illinois for your business," she says. "The people of Illinois suffer from both ends. They're paying more in interest, and they're also getting reduced services."

Standard & Poor's Rating Services also reduced the state's bond rating, citing Illinois' budget deficit and Blagojevich's legal problems.

Earlier, in a move he said would help the state make up for a \$2 billion gap between revenue and spending, Blagojevich closed eight state parks and about a dozen historic sites.

Blagojevich also started to close Pontiac Correctional Center, a maximum security prison, and gradually open an unused maximum security unit in Thomson Correctional Center in northwest Illinois. He said the state could save about \$4 million.

But that plan is at a standstill because of two pending lawsuits, leaving 570 Pontiac employees unsure about their jobs.

About 140 Springfield employees are wondering about their jobs, too, with the Illinois Department of Transportation's Traffic Safety Division. Blagojevich last June proposed moving the positions from Springfield to Harrisburg in Saline County, three hours south, to find a cheaper lease and to spur economic development in the region.

Sen. Larry Bomke, a Springfield Republican and one of the leading forces trying to prevent the move, says Blagojevich was punishing Springfield-area legislators for supporting a constitutional amendment that would have allowed voters to recall elected officials. The recall measure was targeted at Blagojevich, but it failed.

Since Blagojevich's arrest, the IDOT employees' job security is much better, Bomke says.

Meanwhile, patients who recently enrolled in a state health insurance plan are caught in the middle of a different legal battle with the governor.

Blagojevich unilaterally expanded the so-called FamilyCare program so middle-income families could qualify for Medicaid benefits. Three businessmen sued the administration for expanding the program without legislative approval. And because federal reimbursements only pay for low-income patients, the state now foots the bill for Medicaid benefits offered to middle-income patients. An Illinois Supreme Court ruling has allowed the state to continue paying medical providers during the appeals process.

But the FamilyCare expansion is just one example of the "abuse of power" that Madigan cited as evidence for impeachment. "The many instances where the governor took governmental action without authority by the legislature, took governmental action without an appropriation having been adopted, instances where he ignored directives from the legislature."

The speaker's staff has collected such examples throughout the past year, and federal prosecutors added fuel to the fire with allegations that Blagojevich used his public powers for personal gain.

Kent Redfield, political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield, likens Blagojevich to a Chicago ward

## ***Blagojevich's approach to governing was enabled by powers that come along with the executive office. That is, the power to reward, punish, persuade or threaten to advance an agenda.***

boss who operates in a political culture that takes a hard edge on "rewarding your friends and screwing your enemies."

But Blagojevich's approach to governing was enabled by powers that come along with the executive office. That is, the power to reward, punish, persuade or threaten to advance an agenda.

"Those are the tools. Those are the resources that a governor has," Redfield says. "I think you will find everyone who's held the office will use those tools at times."

Other governors were just more discreet, said Taylor Pensoneau, a longtime journalist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and an author, a few weeks before Blagojevich's arrest.

If Blagojevich were a boxer, he'd telegraph his punches, Pensoneau said.

He added that much of what drives the approach to govern by retribution is the pressure to raise money for political campaigns.

"The cost of both running for and then retaining high public office, certainly in this state, is just incredible. And one never seems to feel he or maybe she has enough money."

Minority Leader Cross said he anticipated a healthy dose of discussion about campaign finance reforms this session, and the one positive that could come out of the impeachment process is the opportunity to learn what went wrong. "And we can make government better. We can reform government out of this process."

Without additional campaign finance reforms, Illinois' chapter of "The Sopranos" is unlikely to close. But it'll also take a new effort by the top four legislative leaders — Madigan, Cross, as well as incoming Senate President John Cullerton and Senate Minority Leader Christine

Radogno — to communicate as they try to address the fiscal and policy decisions of 2009.

Madigan said having Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn become governor would help.

"I think that a Gov. Quinn would take a completely different approach to working with the legislature than Gov. Blagojevich has," he said last month. "And therefore, there'd be a great improvement in the relations between the two departments of government."

The day after Blagojevich's arrest, Quinn immediately said he was ready to serve as governor, if needed. And if he became governor, he said, he would reconsider closing the parks and historic sites, the Pontiac prison and the Traffic Safety Division.

Perhaps most encouraging is Quinn's prescription for the kind of government Illinoisans deserve: "We need a humble governor who's proud of our people. I don't believe in the imperial governorship or an imperial anything in a democracy. I think we need to have people in a high office like governor understand the fears and concerns and needs of ordinary, everyday people who live from paycheck to paycheck."

He said he would live in the Executive Mansion in Springfield a few blocks from the Capitol. Calling it the people's house, he said, "I really envision the governor's mansion as being sort of the epicenter of a place where people in Illinois can come and see special things and individuals."

He attends as many funerals of Illinois soldiers killed in Iraq or Afghanistan as possible. He also chairs several state commissions, including the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, the Illinois Main Street Advisory Council and the Broadband Deployment Council. He said he has a pretty good finger on the pulse of average citizens. "I think they are not very happy watching TV every night, the national news, and seeing their state and their governor in this sad state of affairs."

Whenever and however Blagojevich leaves office, the governorship will still carry extraordinary powers. But let's hope the vindictive, personal politics don't continue to feed into Illinois' reputation as a political joke. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at [capitolbureau@aol.com](mailto:capitolbureau@aol.com).

# BRIEFLY

**Q&A**

*Question & Answer*

*Photograph by Bethany Jaeger*



*Senate President-elect John Cullerton speaks with his new majority leader, Sen. James Clayborne during the fall legislative session.*

## **John Cullerton**

*He replaces Senate President Emil Jones Jr., who retired. Cullerton lives on the north side of Chicago. He has a personal friendship and long working relationship with House Speaker Michael Madigan but has said he will not hand over the Senate gavel to Madigan. Cullerton spent 12 years in the House before spending the past 17 in the Senate. He's an attorney described as one step ahead of the game at all times.*

*He spoke with Statehouse bureau chief Bethany Jaeger in late November and again in December. Here is an edited version of those conversations:*

### **Q. You say your priority as Senate president is a capital bill?**

Top priority. Because in a recession, the best thing you could do is public works projects. We've always needed it because it's been so long without having it. Now we need it even more.

Politically, in order to pass that, you probably need to have education funding reforms, changes, additions. So those two would come together as top priorities.

### **Q. What do you bring to the table that could help advance a capital bill?**

There's been fighting between the governor and the speaker, and the president of the Senate and the speaker, and I know I'm not going to fight with the speaker. I'm not going to fight with the governor. And hopefully, I can be a good go-between to try to bring about positive change.

We have a new leader on the Republican side, who I will work with well. I work with Republicans well. So we're going to need their help. People are upset with our dysfunctionality down here, and they want us to solve the problems. They don't care [what party you're from]. So we're going to try to have a more inclusive atmosphere with Republicans and see if we can solve the problems.

### **Q. What was behind your appointment of your opponent for the presidency, Sen. James Clayborne, as majority leader?**

He is a very good friend of mine. And even though we ran against each other, we remain friends. He's a very talented guy. He comes from another part of the state from me, and we need to make sure the downstaters feel like they can work with a leader from Chicago, which we can. So it's important to have him as a person and the symbolism of having somebody from downstate in majority leader.

### **Q. Do you hope to change the rules of the Senate?**

I'm going to let the caucus decide. I'm open to rules changes. They're tricky. Every time you try to create a rule change, usually it's in response to perceived abuse of existing rules, which I don't think I'm going to do. Therefore, I'm open to giving back some power because I'm not planning on abusing it in the first place.

*Photograph by Bethany Jaeger*



*Senate Minority Leader-elect Christine Radogno speaks with outgoing Senate President Emil Jones Jr. the day after being selected by her caucus.*

## **Christine Radogno**

*She replaces Sen. Frank Watson as the new Senate Republican leader, making her the first female elected as leader of any legislative caucus. She lives in Lemont, a Chicago suburb where she started her career as a social worker. She crossed over to local government and politics for the Village of LaGrange before joining the state Senate in 1997. She describes herself as a fiscal conservative who has moderate views on social issues. She is a potential candidate for governor in 2010.*

*Statehouse bureau chief Bethany Jaeger spoke with Radogno in late November and again in early December. Here are edited versions of those conversations:*

### **Q. How will you change the dynamic in the Capitol?**

Everybody has their own personality, their own style. I generally am not someone that loves an open aggressive fight. I have a different style of trying to convince people and get them on my side.

### **Q. Politics always seem to choke a capital bill. Do you expect the politics to ease this year?**

I think what we have are some different dynamics, and maybe we can revisit some of the elements of the capital bill that became sticking points. For example, the gaming as a revenue source, while I have voted for that, it's not been able to make it all the way through the process. So, perhaps we go back and look at different revenue sources. I'm open to that. I'm open to looking at the size of the capital bill. As you might recall, it was growing pretty quickly last spring by about \$1 billion a day. It got all the way up to \$33 billion, including \$1 billion worth of pork spending, a certain amount for open space, for affordable housing. All good causes, but it makes the bill so big that maybe we need to focus on the more traditional roads, bridges, mass transit, schools.

### ***Q. What do you bring that could help advance a capital bill?***

I do have an understanding of the issues and, to some degree, the bonding side of things and how a capital bill works. Not that others before me have not had that, but I'm a different person, a different personality, and I will be interacting with Sen. Cullerton, who is new to the leaders' table, as well. So I think just in general, the excitement about some change from where we've been so stuck will be welcomed, and I hope the dynamic is different and will be fruitful.

### ***Q. The House speaker has said a capital bill will require "tough choices," often perceived as a tax***

### ***increase. What are you prepared to consider?***

The fact of the matter is, a capital bill is a borrowing program. The government borrows billions of dollars in order to fund these infrastructure needs. Whenever you borrow money, you have to pay it back. What we have to do is figure out, how are we going to pay back the money that we borrowed? ... We can go back and look at more traditional sources of revenue for a capital bill. You might recall George Ryan increased the license plate fee from \$48 to \$76. That's a potential revenue source. Driver's license fees have not been increased since I was 16, which was a long time ago. We could look at a gas tax. That's been used oftentimes to fund a capital program. But what is important is that every taxpayer and citizen in this state realize that there is no free lunch. If we want new schools, new roads, new mass transit, we must pay for it.

### ***Q. I didn't hear income taxes mentioned as an option.***

I am not in favor of an income tax increase, particularly at this point. I think the economy is suffering enough in that an income tax increase would result in a further drag on the economy.

### ***Q. Will the leadership change mean the House and Senate are more likely to override the governor? Is he still relevant?***

The governor seems to have done everything he can possibly do to make

himself irrelevant by hurting his relationship with the General Assembly. I think that the General Assembly has overridden the governor in the past on issues that they agreed on. I think that that will continue to happen. I would hope that the governor would change his tactics and try to engage in a constructive way with the General Assembly so that we don't need to be overriding him.

### ***Q. How will your new leadership position affect your potential bid for governor?***

I probably am going to focus on this. I've been in the legislature for a while now, and when I do something, I like to do it well. And I think this is a job that probably takes awhile to develop and [maximize] effectiveness. So I'm looking at staying for a while.

### ***Q. Do you have a first item on the agenda for January?***

As leader, my first priority is making sure that I'm able to communicate and hold our caucus together, make sure that we develop our agenda collectively. We need to settle our differences, as all Republicans do, and look towards the future. We need to focus on the fiscal situation, on ethics, which has been one of the interests of our caucus. So we'll be trying to come together to really set out an agenda that all Republicans and hopefully the citizens of the state can agree on. □

## **Court docket**

- Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration said it would pay medical providers who had been caring for middle-income patients receiving benefits from the governor's expanded Medicaid program, FamilyCare. A trial court judge previously ruled that the administration had to dismantle the program, offering state-sponsored health insurance to middle-income families, without legislative approval (see *Illinois Issues*, November 2008, page 9). The stay is in effect until the Supreme Court decides whether to hear the administration's appeal of the lower court ruling.
- The Illinois Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case alleging the state's 2005 law limiting the amount juries can award for pain and suffering for medical malpractice cases is unconstitutional (see *Illinois Issues*, March 2008, page 24). The Supreme Court will issue an opinion later.
- The Blagojevich administration must release to the Better Government Association federal grand jury subpoenas that have been served upon the administration (see *Illinois Issues*, January 2007, page 24). The Better Government Association sued the administration under the Freedom of Information Act because it would not release the subpoenas.
- Southern Illinois University Carbondale and the Ulysses S. Grant Association settled a lawsuit regarding ownership of the more than 200,000 items covering our 18th president. All association materials will be moved to Mississippi State University. The association severed its 44-year-old ties with SIUC in July 2008 (see *Illinois Issues*, October 2008, page 10).

## To rethink reforms

Illinois' public education system needs more than increased funding, and for too long the debate has focused on controversial tax reforms that tend to polarize policymakers. At least, that's the philosophy of a new well-funded, politically diverse educational reform group based in Chicago.

Advance Illinois is a nonprofit organization designed to be an independent and objective policy group. Its goal so far is to take a broad and long-term view of ways to reverse some of Illinois' worst academic trends that hamstring its students and workforce.

"Illinois schools are performing, despite the fact that we're the fifth largest economy in the country, at an average to below-average level," says Robin Steans,

Advance Illinois executive director and sister of Democratic state Sen. Heather Steans of Chicago. "On any academic measure or any attainment measure you might care to look at, we're trailing the nation. At all grade levels in all subject areas."

She says members will tour the state listening to and researching methods of reform and submit a report to the General Assembly in May, although that most likely will be too late for the legislature to consider the recommendations when crafting the next fiscal year's budget. The report will address ways to improve students' test scores and graduation rates, but they're also considering the distribution of high quality teachers, the preparation of school principals and parental involvement.

Education funding is listed on the bottom portion of the organization's Web site.



*Advance Illinois co-chairs Jim Edgar (left), a Republican and former Illinois governor, and William Daley, a Democrat and former U.S. commerce secretary, announce the policy group during a Springfield news conference.*

Former Gov. Jim Edgar, a Republican who in the 1990s commissioned an independent group to consider tax reforms as a way to fund public education, says he still thinks the state relies too heavily on property taxes. However, he says, school finance is only part of a more comprehensive plan.

"I think that debate's fine, and hopefully I think we can continue to have that debate. But we cannot wait until that debate is resolved before we deal with other issues. I think too often we use it as an excuse not to work on some of these other things."

Edgar says this group is different from previous groups in that it has a more diverse membership, including his co-chair, former U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley, a Democrat and brother of

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. William Daley currently serves as vice chairman of JPMorgan Chase & Co. and is a member of President-elect Barack Obama's transition team. Other high-profile members include former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, a Republican, and Chicago City Clerk Miguel del Valle, a former Democratic state senator who led that chamber's Education Committee.

The campaign also has significant financial backing to the tune of \$5 million over three years. Philanthropic groups include the Joyce Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Grand Victoria Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the McCormick Foundation and the New York-based Wallace Foundation.

*By Bethany Jaeger*

## State gets energy grant for low-income homes

Illinois recently received a \$265 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, commonly referred to as LIHEAP.

LIHEAP began during the energy crisis of the late 1970s, transitioning in 1981 from the Emergency Energy Assistance program into the current program. Its funds assist low-income households with winter heating costs. Many recipients are elderly or families with children.

Since 2006, Congress had increased LIHEAP funding 150 percent, from \$2 billion to \$5 billion for 2009, almost doubling from \$2.7 billion in 2008. Illinois' share of the funding rose almost 80 percent since 2008, making this state the second-largest recipient of LIHEAP funds, behind New York.

According to U.S. Census data, 12 percent of Illinoisans are age

65 or older, more than 12 percent live below the federal poverty level, and 13.8 percent of households earn less than \$14,999 annually.

While the number of LIHEAP-eligible households has declined from 7.1 million to 3.9 million, the number of households served has risen from about 18 million to 30 million, according to a report by the U.S. Administration of Children and Families.

A household that earns less than 150 percent of the federal poverty guideline is eligible for energy assistance. A single adult who earns less than \$1,300 a month, or a family of four that earns less than \$2,650, would qualify under LIHEAP rules.

In Illinois, LIHEAP is managed through the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, with applications processed through a network of 35 community action agencies in 102 offices throughout the state. This year, more than 300,000 low-income households will receive energy assistance.

*Tony Hamelin*

## BUSINESS

### New index tracks high-tech companies

**I**llinois is the first state in the nation to create a statewide public technology index to track companies headquartered in the state. The NASDAQ Stock Market, a subsidiary of the NASDAQ OMX Group Inc., and AeA, a lobbying organization based in Washington, D.C., formed the Illinois Tech Index.

It includes public companies from such sectors as high-tech manufacturing, information technology, biotech and life sciences.

"The Illinois economy is very diverse and helps to drive technology applications, technology development and vertical applications for different industries, such as insurance, etc.," says Ed Longanecker, director of AeA's Midwest Council. "No state other than California has such a substantial presence of core clusters — by that I mean life sciences, pharma, agricultural, biotechnology, information technology, nanotechnology and technology manufacturing."

In addition, he says Illinois offers a variety of funding opportunities and incentives for technology companies. The state also has stellar universities and a skilled talent pool.

Abbott Labs, Archer Daniels Midland, Baxter, Boeing, Illinois Tool Works and Motorola are among the well-known companies, but the index also lists lesser-known companies such as Akorn, Cabot Microelectronics, Fuel Tech, Nanosphere and NeoPharm. The index received support from and works with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development.

"The value of the index is that it highlights Illinois as a center of technology," says Ray Williams, acting deputy director for technology and industrial competitiveness at DCEO.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn, who honorably opened the NASDAQ stock market in October to highlight the tech index, says that since it began last May, it has outperformed the S&P 500, the Dow Jones

Industrial Average and the NASDAQ composite average.

"We're early in the game, but part of our mission here in Illinois is to let the world know that we have a cluster for technology that is well-positioned for sustainable growth."

The companies listed on the index generate billions of dollars in revenue and employ thousands of people in Illinois, says Longanecker.

"The index is intended to show the technology assets we have, the leading companies we have, to help illustrate that Illinois is a place to do business, a place for employment opportunities and innovation."

Illinois' high-tech industry, which counted 16,100 companies in 2006, employs nearly 210,000 people in the state, and workers earn an average wage of \$77,100, or 68 percent more than workers in the private sector as a whole, according to data collected by AeA in a report called *Cyberstates 2008*.

Longanecker says his group will work with the new General Assembly to push several pieces of legislation held from the 2008 session. A Senate bill, **SB 786**, would authorize the state treasurer to set up a special account to provide venture capital for technology companies. Three House bills (**HB 4881**, **HB 4482**, **HB 4883**) also would give incentives to technology companies. The first would establish a program to award grants to emerging-technology enterprises; the second would create an income tax credit for investors in biotechnology companies; and the third would create an income tax deduction for receipts from patents for inventions by companies with fewer than 500 employees or nonprofit organizations.

In addition to state agencies, the creation of the index was supported by Baker & McKenzie, the Illinois Biotechnology Industry Organization and Grant Thornton LLP.

Williams sums up the enthusiasm for the Illinois Tech Index: "Someday I'd like to see Chicago as the Silicon Valley of the Midwest."

Beverley Scobell

### Public taxes for private profit

Illinois is the No. 1 state in terms of tax incentives to retailers. In 2007, they cost the state \$126 million in lost revenue, according to a report from Good Jobs First, a nonprofit research group based in Washington, D.C.

A vendor discount or giveback is a tax agreement that lets retailers keep a percentage of the retail sales tax money collected at the point of sale.

Retailers are allowed to keep 1.75 percent of Illinois' 6.25 percent general merchandise retail sales tax, says Mike Klemens, communications spokesman for the Illinois Department of Revenue. The system of vendor discounts goes back to the era before personal computers. The purpose was to compensate small-business merchants for book-keeping expenses incurred in collecting and calculating state sales taxes.

But in today's retail environment, large retailers and big-box stores are highly computerized. The logic behind the vendor discount policy no longer applies and acts to deprive the state of needed tax revenue, Klemens says. According to the Good Jobs First report, one national retailer made \$70 million last year from state-supported vendor discounts.

Some states, such as California, North Carolina and Tennessee, have eliminated the discounts, while Indiana, Wisconsin and others have reduced their vendor discount rates or placed caps on them. There is no cap in Illinois.

The Illinois Department of Revenue has proposed caps of \$500 per month, or \$6,000 annually for general purchases, and would limit dealers to \$10 for each returned vehicle. The proposal would raise \$70 million in revenue annually, Klemens says.

Tony Hamelin

For more news see the Illinois Issues Web site at <http://illinoisisissues.uis.edu>

## Motel may get new life as Route 66 attraction

The Bel-Aire Motel sits on old Route 66, which from 1930 to 1977 ran through the middle of Springfield. No longer a wayside stop for travelers, the motel in recent years has deteriorated and been the source of numerous calls to the Springfield Police Department. The capital city's mayor wants to use state and federal grants — no city funds — to renovate the property and use it as a gateway to draw thousands of Route 66 tourists up Sixth Street and toward other Springfield attractions.

The Illinois Historic Route 66 Discovery Center, which is still just a twinkle in the eye of planners, would save an iconic stop on the old route and turn it into a destination, says Patty Ambrose, executive director of the Illinois Route 66 Heritage Project.

"It could be the crown jewel of the whole road," she says, because there is nothing like the concept anywhere along the route. Designers have envisioned a state-of-the-art interpretive center that would incorporate a theater and holograms among other technology to interpret the experiences found on Route 66.

Beverley Scobell

## Value of emotional labor in public service studied

Human service caseworkers, prison guards, emergency dispatchers and other public service employees depend on emotional labor as much as cognitive or physical labor to do their jobs right, according to a researcher at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"In colloquial terms, it's an effort within to generate your own appropriate effect to get the job done or to elicit a feeling in someone else to get your objective met," says Sharon Mastracci, assistant professor of public administration at the University of Illinois at Chicago and co-author of a new book, *Emotional Labor: Putting the Service in Public Service* (M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

Two case studies in the book looked at the Cook County Public Guardian's office and the state Department of Corrections. Public guardians work with children not old enough and adults not able enough to handle their own affairs. Workers there have to elicit a sense of trust from the clients. However, state workers interacting with people imprisoned must control their emotions to elicit a sense of authority.

"It's not trying to be emotional at work — people say, 'Oh, we can't be emotional at work' — but it's the effort it takes to swallow those emotions. It's emotion management, managing your

own, managing others' emotions to get your job done, and it's both positive and negative," says Mastracci.

She and fellow researchers, Meredith Newman of Florida International University in Miami and Mary Guy of the University of Colorado at Denver, collected data from interviews, focus groups and surveys. They conclude that the value of emotional labor should be acknowledged by public administrators in job descriptions and job applicant screenings and in employee training, development and retention strategies.

Mastracci says the demand for emotional labor skills will grow in the future. Though she has no hard numbers at this time, she says some social scientists estimate about one-third of the nation's jobs require emotional labor and that the number of public service jobs requiring the skill is probably higher.

The need for face-to-face government services, particularly at state and local levels, cannot be replaced with technology, she says. Yet, how citizens go away from those personal interactions often influences their perception of government efficiency and support for government programs.

Beverley Scobell

## College takes Chicago plan into virtual world

The centennial celebration of Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's Plan of Chicago, commonly called the Burnham Plan, is being prepared on many fronts with dozens of projects, most of which will be ready for a summer party.

Lake Forest College is taking a high-tech approach, creating the Virtual Burnham Initiative, which takes the flat images from the plan and turns them into 3-D models accessible through Google Earth ([vbi.lakeforest.edu](http://vbi.lakeforest.edu)). Structures such as the sciences, arts and letters buildings that Burnham designed and intended for Grant Park but were never built overlay a contemporary map of downtown. The site also has overlays of the plan for the harbor and 1909 population density.

"Burnham and Bennett's work suggests not only their version of the ideal

Chicago, but also the importance of envisioning and re-envisioning the world that we live in. Ideas that were never realized are sometimes more important than bricks and mortar in such a process. The VBI wants to give its users not only a glimpse of how the city might have looked, but also spur further re-conceptualization of the way things could be in the future," says Davis Schneiderman, co-director of the initiative. "The project takes history, expresses it in a wondrous virtual interface and then asks the user: What's next?"

Schneiderman says his group is making details of Burnham's plan available based on geographic locators. Historical documents are digitized and linked to buildings in the virtual world. For example, if a Burnham memo mentions the plan as it was being prepared, a link

would point to the Railway Exchange Building where he had his offices and rooms for draftsmen.

The college is working closely with a coalition of other Chicago-area institutions, including high schools, to make the site a learning tool. Schneiderman says Lake Forest Community High School students are using the modeling technology to document the history of a gentleman's farm in the area. Waukegan High School students are applying the technology to the future, envisioning their town in 20 to 30 years.

"The centennial," says Schneiderman, "is in many ways about the wide legacy of the 1909 plan — not only for issues of transportation, greenspaces and other aspects of planning — but for our collective cultural imagination."

Beverley Scobell

## Fewer African-American students pick public universities over private

Fewer African-Americans are choosing public universities.

From 1997 to 2007, the number of African-American students enrolled at Illinois public universities decreased by 4 percent, but they increased 23 percent at private schools, according to statistics compiled by the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

While the overall percentage of African-Americans enrolled in college has dropped for public campuses, the bachelor's degree graduation rate increased by 17 percent over the same period.

In the Chicago metropolitan area, Chicago State and Governors State universities graduated the most African-American students, calculated as a percentage of the total graduating class.

Downstate, Southern Illinois University Carbondale increased its African-American undergraduate graduation rate to 12 percent of the overall 2007 graduating class.

The national graduation rate for African-Americans rose 4 percent from 2005 to 2006, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Overall graduation rates for African-Americans are at 43 percent, with 47 percent for women and 36 percent for men, according to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

"College recruitment and retention of African-American students remains a challenge," says Joseph Brown, director of Black American Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. SIUC has implemented a first-year experience program that offers African-American students intensive tutoring, counseling and academic advising.

"More needs to be done to provide a supportive community that fosters higher success rates," Brown says. For example, he says many African-American students are first-generation college students. Often their families do not understand the unique pressures and challenges the student faces. He recommends universities implement family orientation programs to help families understand and be more supportive of the students' situation.

Tony Hamelin

## LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

*A two-year stalemate between Gov. Rod Blagojevich and the 95th General Assembly halted major legislation, but lawmakers did agree on some less well-known measures that took effect January 1. Legislators also sent numerous bills to the governor during their annual fall session.*

*The 96th General Assembly is sworn in January 14.*

### Autism services

**SB 934** Insurance policies will be required to cover up to \$36,000 for autism diagnosis and treatment services for children younger than 21 under a bill signed by the governor in December. Legislators repeatedly approved similar measures, but they fell victim to political battles between legislative leaders and the governor. The insurance benefit will be adjusted for inflation each year.

### Horse racing subsidy

**HB 4758** The horse racing industry will receive another boost from the state's riverboat gambling facilities under a measure signed by the governor. It extends the subsidy, which shaves 3 percent of profits for riverboats generating more than \$2 million a year. It's designed to help the horse racing industry and the related agribusiness industry compete with other types of gambling in the state. The subsidy would end if Illinois law changed to allow slot machines at race tracks, as has been proposed.

### Restored funding

**SB 1103** Services for people with substance abuse disorders received \$55 million, which will capture another \$55 million in federal matching funds. Blagojevich cut the state funding last year as a way to help make up for a \$2 billion budget gap.

The governor did not, however, restore funding for historic sites, a dozen of which closed November 30. Some state parks also received funding after having been cut, but eight parks still closed in the fall.

As of mid-December, reduced funding also remained for constitutional officers,

as well as for multiple legislative units and commissions.

### Clean coal

**SB 1987** Taylorville in central Illinois got a positive sign that a first-of-its-kind "clean-coal" power plant would be built in its neighborhood. Legislators approved a measure that would allow Tenaska Inc., a Nebraska-based energy company, to conduct a study to estimate the cost and design of the proposed Taylorville Energy Center. It also would set the framework for the state's long-term energy portfolio by requiring future power plants to use Illinois coal and advanced technology to reduce pollution.

The study is estimated to cost \$24 million, of which the state would pay \$18 million. Once the study is complete, the legislature will vote on whether to let the project continue (see *Illinois Issues*, June 2008, page 6).

### Emergency Budget Act

**SB 3077** The governor would be able to withhold 8 percent of funding for state agencies, elementary and higher education systems, the five state pension systems and local governments. This measure is part of his four-point plan to manage a state budget that he says spends \$2 billion more than it expects to receive in revenue. Legislators held hearings on the matter, but the governor's team asked for more time to rework the plan.

## NEW LAWS

*The following laws were enacted January 1.*

### Ethics reform

**HB 824** Businesses seeking state contracts worth more than \$50,000 can no longer donate to the political campaigns of officeholders who sign those contracts. The legislation took three years to pass and advanced only after presidential candidate Barack Obama made a personal phone call to Senate President Emil Jones Jr. to allow a vote.

## **DUI penalties**

**SB 2396** If first-time driving-under-the-influence offenders want driving privileges, they have to install a device on their vehicles that requires them to blow into a tube before they can start the motor. The so-called ignition interlocking device checks their blood alcohol levels and won't let the car start if alcohol is detected. Offenders will have to pay a \$30 monthly fee, which will help pay for the program. The governor cut funding for the program last year, but the secretary of state's office shuffled money from elsewhere to ensure the program started January 1.

## **Health insurance**

**HB 1432** Insurance companies will have to pay for treatment of eating disorders, as well as sexual abuse, starting this month. If the victim of abuse dies, then the policies must cover services for the victims' family members or domestic partners.

## **Tuition for veterans**

**HB 5905** Starting in the 2009-2010 school year, soldiers on active duty out of state or overseas must get in-state college tuition rates if they lived in this state for at least three years before deploying.

## **Alcoholic energy drinks**

**SB 2472** Energy drinks containing alcohol, dubbed alcopops, must establish clearer labeling to help prevent minors from buying them or disguising them from adults. The labels must say the drinks contain alcohol and list the alcohol content.

## **Food pantries**

**HB 3399** Charitable organizations that offer food banks, soup kitchens or other hunger relief programs must now register with their local health departments. The intent is to ensure that officials can alert all food banks of recalls and other emergencies.

Bethany Jaeger

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# The two faces of Illinois politics

The governor and president-elect contrast the depths of disgrace against the heights of glory

analysis by Dave McKinney

In the same 35-day span, the world saw two remarkably different faces of the Land of Lincoln.

One was Barack Obama, savoring his historic win before more than 100,000 admirers in Chicago's Grant Park, standing as a polished and inspiring symbol of change for Illinois and America, the first African-American president. A man of honesty, the masses hoped.

The other was Rod Blagojevich. What he had done in the few short weeks since Obama won the presidency would make the 16th president "roll over in his grave," U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald would later say. Taking Illinois to a "truly new low," the governor concocted an unprecedented "political corruption crime spree" in which he intended to auction off Obama's vacant Senate seat to the highest bidder and "feverishly" shake down state contractors for even more cash, Fitzgerald alleged.

In 190 years, Illinoisans have not walked in such political gravity. Producing unmatched euphoria one week and utter disgust the next, the state's two best-known politicians have made Chicago and Springfield recognized datelines around the world. While Illinois has always been associated with great poets and authors, scientific achievements and natural wonders, we are also defined by our crooked politicians.

Obama's historic win momentarily erased the stain of on-the-take Chicago aldermen and possibly a thrown 1960 presidential election. But by getting his

name plastered on front pages from Australia to Alberta, Blagojevich became the butt of late-night television humorists and hardened the dishonor associated with Illinois, high-jumping the imprisoned string of governors that preceded him. As the state's next big political corruption trial looms, at which Blagojevich may be proven the most criminal of all corrupt Illinois governors, his debacle leaves one big question: How can Illinois ever undo the damage done to the state's image and

to those reliant upon its services?

"The breadth of corruption laid out in these charges is staggering. They allege that Blagojevich put a 'for sale' sign on the naming of a United States senator, involved himself personally in pay-to-play schemes with the urgency of a salesman meeting his annual sales target, and corruptly used his office in an effort to trample editorial voices of criticism," Fitzgerald said at a news conference explaining the arrest.

*Photograph courtesy of the Chicago Sun-Times, by John White*



*Gov. Rod Blagojevich leaves his home on December 10, the day after his arrest.*

Picturing Blagojevich as he was in 2002, as a crusader against George Ryan's corrupt legacy, puts some of Blagojevich's alleged wrongdoing in perspective. This, after all, was a man who vowed to voters over and over to "change business as usual," cleansing Illinois of the bad taste left by Ryan. Dig around on Blagojevich's Web site a few moments, and press releases capturing those heady days spring to life as relics of a politician Illinoisans once believed. In January 2003, after instituting ethics training for state workers and setting up an "ethics hotline," the governor strode before cameras in full political plume. "Stopping public corruption and improving ethical standards will be ongoing priorities for my administration. The people of Illinois expect a new day of integrity, of openness and accountability — and they deserve a government as good and honest as they are," the governor said.

Fast forward five years, and the misdeeds Fitzgerald outlined were anything but "good" and "honest" government. It was a "new day" all right, but not as the governor had promised. The charges against Blagojevich were conspiracy to

commit mail and wire fraud and solicitation of bribery. Caught on a remarkable set of undercover government recordings that might make Richard Nixon blush, Blagojevich could be heard boasting about his sole power to appoint Obama's successor. "I've got this thing and it's f--- golden, and, uh, uh, I'm just not giving it up for f--- nothing. I'm not gonna do it," he told adviser John Wyma. The governor was heard saying he might derive as much as \$1.5 million in campaign contributions from U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson and an unidentified "emissary" if the governor were to appoint the Illinois Democratic congressman to the Obama seat. Jackson has denied knowledge of the governor's alleged scheme to sell the seat and of offering contributions in exchange for it.

Blagojevich also contemplated appointing Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett, whom the governor perceived as the president-elect's No. 1 choice. In exchange, the governor allegedly theorized he could work out a deal with Obama to get appointed to a high-paying post with the Service Employees International Union, get wife Patti installed on corporate boards with a

six-figure salary or maybe win himself an ambassadorship or Cabinet-level appointment that could propel him to the 2016 nomination for president.

Blagojevich was apparently eager for any of these alternatives, allegedly saying on tape that he is "struggling" financially and does "not want to be governor for the next two years." He suggested forming a nonprofit group that he could head that might be funded — hoping for Obama's help — by \$15 million in seed money from billionaire Warren Buffett, an Obama supporter and economic adviser. Obama has said neither he nor Jarrett knew anything about Blagojevich's varied schemes, which the president-elect called "appalling."

The government tapes also allegedly captured Blagojevich and his wife discussing a scheme to trade state approval of a Wrigley Field buyout for the scalps of *Chicago Tribune* editorial writers who called for the governor's impeachment.

And there was more. The federal complaint against Blagojevich alleged a series of instances where the governor offered to trade official acts for campaign contribu-

## Operation Board Games timeline

- Rod Blagojevich is elected governor in November 2002.
- In 2002, according to an indictment, Stuart Levine conspires to defraud the Teachers' Retirement System where he served as a board member.
- Between 2003 and 2004, Blagojevich adviser and fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko and Levine scheme to collect kickbacks from firms seeking business in Illinois, according to prosecutors.
- In August 2003, Blagojevich reappoints Levine to the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board.
- In May 2004, Blagojevich reappoints Levine to the Teachers' Retirement System board.
- On May 9, 2005, Levine is indicted on charges that he was involved in a kickback scheme related to the facilities planning board. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "the revelation is the first indication that the Blagojevich administration is under federal criminal investigation."
- In August 2005, Levine is indicted on

- corruption charges related to TRS.
- In October 2005, the *Chicago Sun-Times* reports that Blagojevich is the individual prosecutors described as Public Official A in court documents concerning the ongoing Operation Board Games investigation.
- On October 11, 2006, Blagojevich fundraiser Rezko is indicted in two separate cases. He is charged with seeking millions in kickbacks and campaign donations for the governor.
- On October 27, 2006, Levine pleads guilty to corruption charges.
- On May 23, 2007, the *Tribune* reports that federal prosecutors subpoenaed records from Blagojevich's campaign fund.
- On December 13, 2007, Blagojevich's chief fundraiser, Chris Kelly, is indicted on tax evasion charges involving gambling losses.
- Beginning January 1, 2008, Blagojevich and Chief of Staff John Harris demand that the *Chicago Tribune* fire editorial page staff members in exchange for financial assistance related to the potential lease of

Wrigley Field to the state, according to the federal prosecutor's complaint.

- In May 2008, Ali Ata, who was appointed by Blagojevich as executive director of the Illinois Finance Authority, pleads guilty to making false statements to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and tax fraud. In his plea agreement, he agrees to cooperate in the government's investigation of Blagojevich.
- On May 31, 2008, lawmakers pass ethics reforms limiting campaign contributions from state contractors.
- On June 4, 2008, Rezko is convicted of using his political ties to the governor to run a kickback scheme.
- On August 25, 2008, Blagojevich vetoes the ethics bill, saying it's not tough enough and doesn't cover lawmakers.
- On September 22, 2008, the legislature overrides the governor's veto of the ethics bill.
- On October 8, 2008, federal prosecutors say they learned that Blagojevich is considering rescinding \$8 million

tions. In one case, Blagojevich told Wyma that he expected an unidentified highway contractor to raise \$500,000 in contributions. In another, more egregious instance, the governor allegedly threatened to withhold \$8 million the state owed to Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago because its CEO, Patrick Magoon, didn't make a \$50,000 contribution to Blagojevich as the governor expected.

The brazenness and breadth of what Blagojevich allegedly did for his own financial gain makes him one of the most sinister officeholders in modern state history if the federal charges against him are proven, says political historian and author Taylor Pensoneau, a former Statehouse reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who has written well-regarded biographies on Gov. Dan Walker and Gov. Richard Ogilvie.

With the *Post-Dispatch*, Pensoneau covered two chief executives who were imprisoned after leaving office: former Gov. Otto Kerner and Walker. Kerner, who served from 1961 to 1968, was convicted of accepting bribes from racetrack executive Marge Lindheimer Everett in

exchange for choice racing dates and two expressway exits at Arlington Park race-track. The payments came to light when Everett declared the bribes to Kerner in her taxes as a business expense. Walker, who was governor from 1973 to 1977, was convicted in 1987 of making illegal loans to himself at an Oak Brook savings and loan he headed.

Pensoneau says Blagojevich's alleged offenses eclipse in seriousness what Kerner or Walker were convicted of. The same is true, he says, when compared to George Ryan's misdeeds. Pensoneau says Blagojevich's alleged crimes seem more noteworthy even than the \$800,000 former Secretary of State Paul Powell mysteriously stuffed in shoeboxes and hid in his suite at Springfield's St. Nicholas Hotel, though Powell never was charged. In fact, Pensoneau says, one really needs to turn to Orville Hodge to truly find corruption on par with Blagojevich's alleged misdeeds. Hodge was the state auditor of public accounts from 1953 to 1956 who embezzled more than \$1 million in state funds to buy cars and property and to maintain his airplane before being caught

and imprisoned.

"If everything holds true that is alleged, Rod Blagojevich is going to be right at the top. He'd be either equal to or right below Hodge," Pensoneau says, when asked to rate the state's most corrupt politicians during the past 70 years. "The Blagojevich situation seems to raise the gubernatorial corruption level to a new level. I think the state has entered a rather new orbit with this latest situation."

One prominent government watchdog group hopes that all of the wrongdoing alleged on Blagojevich's watch could presage a golden era in ethics reform in Springfield. The Campaign for Political Reform, which won ethics reforms after scandals in Gov. Jim Edgar's and Ryan's administrations, intends to push lawmakers next spring to enact contribution limits that mirror restrictions at the federal level, where individuals can donate no more than \$2,300 per election cycle. Sky's-the-limit contributions allowed under Illinois' system really are at the root of the Blagojevich scandal and need to be curtailed by lawmakers if they are serious about repairing the state's stained reputation,

in state funds pledged to Children's Memorial Hospital because a hospital executive had not made a recent campaign contribution, according to the complaint.

- In early October 2008, prosecutors say they discovered that Blagojevich "was accelerating his corrupt fundraising activities to accumulate as much money as possible before the implementation of ethics legislation on January 1, 2009, that would severely curtail [his] ability to raise money from individuals and entities conducting business with the State of Illinois."
- On October 30, 2008, Springfield powerbroker William Cellini is indicted, with prosecutors charging that he had extorted campaign contributions for Blagojevich.
- On November 3, 2008, Blagojevich discusses what he might receive in exchange for appointing someone to the U.S. Senate seat to be later vacated by the president-elect, according to the prosecution's complaint: The Sen-

ate seat "is a [expletive] valuable thing, you just don't give it away for nothing."

- On November 4, 2008, Blagojevich allegedly tells Harris to inform the *Tribune*'s financial adviser, the Chicago Cubs chairman and the *Tribune*'s owner that "our recommendation is fire all those [expletive] people, get 'em the [expletive] out of there and get us some editorial support."
- On November 7, 2008, Blagojevich, Harris and a deputy governor allegedly discuss private foundations or boards where the governor might be able to get a job in exchange for filling the Senate seat. According to prosecutors, Blagojevich wanted a salary of \$250,000 to \$300,000.
- On November 7, 2008, according to prosecutors, Blagojevich tells an adviser he is willing to "trade" the Senate seat in exchange for the position of secretary of Health and Human Services in the president-elect's Cabinet, according to the affidavit. Harris was heard saying that Blagojevich

would like a job for himself heading the Service Employees International Union-related organization Change to Win, according to the complaint.

- On November 12, 2008, Blagojevich, according to prosecutors, tells Harris that his decision about the open Senate seat will be based on three criteria in the following order of importance: "our legal situation, our personal situation, my political situation."
- On December 4, 2008, Blagojevich allegedly tells an adviser that he might "get some [money] up front, maybe" from U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. to ensure that he will keep a promise to raise funds for Blagojevich if he runs for re-election, according to the complaint.
- On December 5, 2008, the *Tribune* reports that the federal government has made covert tapes of Blagojevich.
- On December 9, 2008, FBI agents arrest Blagojevich at his home. He and Harris are charged with political corruption. Harris has since resigned.



President-elect Barack Obama

says the group's director, Cynthia Canary.

"This latest scandal really underscores the need for contribution limits. We can't just run a state with the bank vault open that allows greedy people to rob us blind," she says.

"It's interesting in the Obama context. Certainly Obama ran in the federal system with limits. He raised more money than we've ever seen anyone raise. But he also brought in a really substantial amount of small donors, and there was a sense of people being empowered. They felt their donations, their participation mattered," she says. "In the system we're in right now in Illinois, the \$200 or the \$50 donor has to feel like a dupe next to the \$100,000 donor."

Canary prodded Obama, as a presidential candidate, to place a well-timed phone call to Illinois Senate President Emil Jones Jr., a fellow Chicago Democrat, to dislodge legislation limiting how much state contractors can donate to officeholders who award their contracts. While she understands Obama has far more serious problems with which to contend as president, Canary says she wouldn't mind similar intervention from Obama in pursuit of meaningful donation caps in Illinois.

"Clearly his job now is to govern a nation. But I think part of that is working with this state, providing some inspiration, some leadership to this state — this is his home — to really serve as a model to the whole country about how commitment to change can really work on the

ground somewhere," she says. Despite Canary's push for tighter contribution restrictions, the General Assembly has been loathe to impose such standards in the past, fearing it would give an undue advantage to wealthy candidates and force those seeking public office to spend more time than they do now hitting people up for money. Some legislators think the pay-to-play prohibition that lawmakers approved in November over Blagojevich's objections needs time to work. And listing campaign contributions and expenses on the Internet — a decade-old change imposed right after the Edgar administration's own pay-to-play scandal involving Management Services of Illinois — still pays dividends, they say.

Incoming state Senate President John Cullerton recalls his days as a congressional candidate in 1994 when he tried unsuccessfully to unseat ethically tarnished U.S. Rep. Dan Rostenkowski. In the end, Rostenkowski outspent Cullerton by more than 2-to-1, and Cullerton was unable to overcome Rostenkowski's advantage of incumbency, even though the congressman was the target of a federal grand jury investigation. While Cullerton says he is "open to anything to restore the confidence and honesty of our elected officials" in Blagojevich's aftermath, that long-ago bid for Congress has shaped his views on the campaign-finance front and could work against the type of sweeping change Canary seeks.

"I'm open to more daylight. But with my own experience, when I ran for Congress, I spent my whole day raising money. That's all I did. I didn't go out and meet anybody. At the time, it was a \$1,000 cap. I had to ask five people [to raise a total of] \$5,000," Cullerton recalls.

"Now, everything is disclosed. Especially with the Internet, it's easier to see who's giving what. If there is, say, a campaign contribution and then an appointment to a board, sure enough, the U.S. attorney and reporters will be there to investigate it," he says.

In Blagojevich's case, Cullerton says, "what you have to acknowledge is he got caught. Or, it appears he got caught. ... George Ryan's prison sentence didn't seem to discourage criminal activity by the governor, assuming he is convicted. Like most things, it's not 'pass this law, and it solves the problem.'"

Without an Obama connection, Blagojevich's problems wouldn't likely have reached a global audience and be fueling such a discussion over what the next big ethics reform should include. Despite legislative reticence for a top-to-bottom rewrite of state ethics laws to prevent another Blagojevich scandal, any effort to clean up the system has to begin at the ground level: Voters have to care and demand change.

"I do not believe corruption has to be a permanent characteristic of any given state," says Larry Sabato, a nationally known political analyst who heads the University of Virginia's Center for Politics and has written a book called *Dirty Little Secrets: The Persistence of Corruption in American Politics*.

"The central and most vital point about corruption is it flourishes where people permit it to, in part because they expect it in the normal course of events. A classic case comes from your state with Otto Kerner being caught solely because the people extending the bribes to him actually deducted it from their taxes as a necessary and ordinary business expense," he says. "Their argument was, 'This is how business is done in Illinois.' That's what has to change. It's always up to the people. It's a democracy. They have to go beyond the images."

Early on, Blagojevich had harbored hopes that it would be he, not Obama, sitting behind a desk in the Oval Office at the White House, but the governor's career trajectory appears headed toward history's political trash heap. Seasoned observers like Sabato marvel at how Illinois' political system can produce two such disparate figures. Perish the thought, Sabato says, that the rest of the world should view the 13 million of us the same way they now see Blagojevich.

"I tell people all the time that politics is yin and yang. You have politicians who are remarkably good and politicians in the very same system who are very bad. It's yin and yang. That may be more true here than in any other case. But Illinois should be grateful for Obama," he says. "Without Obama, we'd be associating the state solely with corruption." □

Dave McKinney is the Statehouse bureau chief for the Chicago Sun-Times.

# The long haul

Illinois' chronic fiscal problems will make it harder to recover from the national recession

by Bethany Jaeger

This year might be a good time to take up yoga.

Consumers will continue to need more ways to relieve stress as the recession threatens their jobs and their personal wealth. Budget experts expect little, if any, economic good news for the next 18 months.

It's a vicious cycle. Consumers stop spending money on homes, vehicles and services. When the demand for goods and services declines, employers lay off workers. Without a paycheck, even more consumers tighten their wallets, continuing to hurt the economy.

"It's hard to break that cycle," says Jim Muschinske, revenue manager for the state's economic forecasting arm, called the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability.

State government garners less tax revenue during each downward spin of the cycle. And the downturn comes at a particularly bad time for Illinois because the state already started 2008 by spending more than it would make in tax revenue. Although the Illinois Constitution requires lawmakers to enact balanced budgets each year, they repeatedly have pushed unpaid bills into the future.

"We're balancing the budget by not paying people," says Dan Long, the economic commission's executive director.

Even in good years, when state government collected more revenue than needed to operate, lawmakers neither caught up on unpaid bills nor built a significant rainy day fund for emergencies.

Unlike world leaders battling the international economic crisis, the Illinois General Assembly and the governor do have some control over the state's structural deficit. Their problems are just made worse by the economic slowdown.

"We're going into recession with no reserves, a huge backlog of unpaid bills and a budget that was unbalanced even before the recession came," says economics professor J. Fred Giertz with the University of Illinois' Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Economic forecasters wouldn't be surprised if the state takes in less money than it did last year, meaning something's got to give.

A recession is defined by consecutive months of decreasing revenues and increasing unemployment, and the state's fiscal commission anticipates a deeper and longer downturn than Illinoisans experienced in the 1980s. In addition, unlike the recession in 2001 and 2002, when consumers fared pretty well, the current economic slump is more broad-based and hits consumers harder, Muschinske says.



Rep. Frank Mautino, a member of the legislative Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, looks over the ominous revenue update for fiscal year 2009.

The demand for social services is expected to increase at the same time that the state must dedicate more money to programs outside of its core services.

The problem will get worse in fiscal year 2010, which starts July 1.

One of the largest spending pressures the General Assembly will face is for public employee pensions. Lawmakers have to find a way to make the highest payment in state history — about \$4 billion — to fund pensions for teachers, judges, lawmakers, state workers and university employees.

That's an increase of more than \$1 billion over last year, but it's also more than the state is expected to collect in new revenue.

The higher pension payment is rooted in a 1995 law that established a gradually increasing payment plan designed to force state government to have enough assets on hand to meet 90 percent of its pension liabilities by 2045. The plan was born out of a chronic failure to fully fund the pensions. Fiscal year 2010 is scheduled to be the last year of the so-called ramp up. The annual payments

would start to back off in fiscal year 2011.

The upcoming ramp up is "catching us at the worst time," says Muschinske.

With the recent stock market decline, the state's pension investments have lost value. Assets for all five pension systems dropped from \$70.5 billion in June 2007 to \$50.5 billion in October 2008.

The poor return on investments means the state has to make up \$510 million more than originally planned, according to the economic commission. What was expected to be a \$710 million increase in the payment became a \$1.22 billion increase.

State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias has proposed a plan to save up to \$82 million a year by consolidating the state's three pension investment boards, but his idea faced early opposition among pension officials and some state lawmakers.

Meanwhile, the state struggles to pay for daily operations, let alone public employee pensions. The challenge increases with projections that Illinois will collect less tax revenue than it did last year.

That's partially because economists say the worst job losses are yet to come. Multiple rounds of layoffs in late 2008 marked only the beginning, Muschinske says. The state's unemployment rate is expected to increase from an average of 6.8 percent to 8.2 percent.

Less income for Illinois residents means less tax revenue for state government. Muschinske says he doesn't look for a recovery in personal income tax receipts for state government until 2011.

The dominoes keep falling because consumer spending has hit a record low, meaning the state also collects less in sales taxes and corporate income taxes, a significant indication that this recession could outlast those of the past 36 years.

For instance, when consumers stop buying houses, they don't purchase as many couches, appliances and construction materials. Sales of single-family homes have dropped below the recession levels of the early 1990s.

Illinoisans also are buying fewer cars, decreasing automobile registrations to the lowest point since 1998.

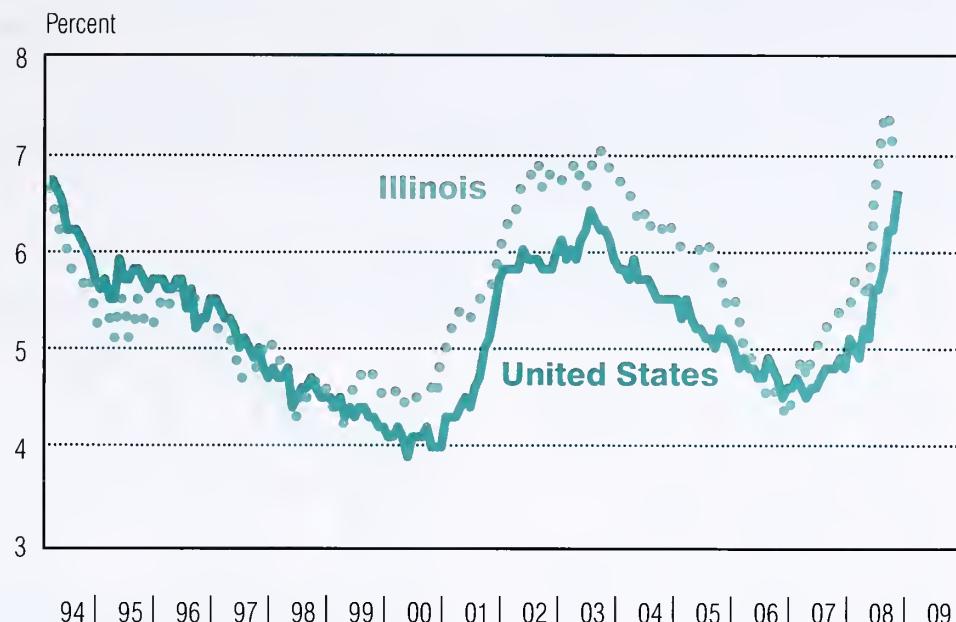
## General funds revenue history: annual change Fiscal year 1991 - Fiscal year 2008 (in millions)



Source: Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability

## Unemployment rates

*Illinois joined 21 states that started the fiscal year with a revenue shortfall. And it's one of 31 states that expects further shortfalls through June, according to the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities in Washington, D.C.*



*Source: Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability*

Even taxes on riverboat gambling facilities, which help fund public education in Illinois, have brought in less money and are expected to continue to decline. Lawmakers could anticipate a one-time influx of about \$435 million when the state finally activates a long-dormant 10th gaming license, which would allow a new riverboat to be built. But the lease had yet to be settled by mid-December and was headed for another round of challenges.

The national economy is partially to blame for the state's revenue picture. Illinois joined 21 states that started the fiscal year with a revenue shortfall. And it's one of 31 states that expects further shortfalls through June, according to the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities in Washington, D.C.

This state is better off than others. Illinois has a budget gap of more than \$2 billion, which accounts for 6 percent of its general funds. Nevada's \$1.5 billion shortfall seems smaller but consumes 21 percent of its biennial budget.

Even when the national recession starts to lift and consumers begin to feel more confident, however, Illinois will still face structural problems that make it even harder to recover from the recession.

In early December, Comptroller Dan Hynes reported that state government didn't have enough cash on hand to pay about \$4 billion worth of bills, including payments owed to medical providers who care for low-income and disabled patients on Medicaid.

Hynes' spokeswoman, Carol Knowles, says unpaid bills threatened everything from police officers filling their gas tanks to prisons paying vendors for food deliveries. Downstate mass transit districts and home health care providers for seniors also sent out SOS signals, saying without more timely payments, they might have to shut down services.

The state pays the bills as cash flows in, but the comptroller's office also has to have enough money on hand for such long-term obligations as employee payrolls and general state aid for schools.

"It's a very delicate balancing act," Knowles says, "and the larger the bill backlog is, the more difficult it is to answer the emergencies when they arise because it gets to the point where everything is an emergency."

In mid-December, the comptroller, the treasurer and the governor agreed to borrow about \$1.4 billion to pay down

some of the backlogged bills. Such short-term borrowing is common, although the amount must be repaid by the end of the fiscal year, June 30.

The comptroller also has throughout the past few years tapped into the state's so-called rainy day fund to pay bills, but the fund had a zero balance in December.

Not that it was flush to begin with. The rainy day fund typically contains only \$276 million, which is about 1 percent of the state's general funds. Numerous other states of various sizes have reserves of \$1 billion or more, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

If there is one positive outcome from the nation's economic woes, it's that in the future, states might be more inclined to build more significant cushions into their rainy day funds, says Scott Pattison, executive director of the National Association of State Budget Officers in Washington, D.C.

"In [the budget officers'] defense, we knew there'd be a downturn, but I don't think anybody expected it to this degree. So what was probably fairly reasonable at the time, now it's — gosh," he said, without finishing the sentence.

**The combination** of the highest pension payment in history and the longest and deepest recession in more than three decades calls for creative budget solutions.

Traditional survival mechanisms normally include cutting programs or raising taxes, but these are anything but traditional times.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich repeatedly refused to do the latter, and agencies and statewide officeholders already have scaled back their operations, laying off hundreds of employees and requiring workers to take unpaid days off. Eight parks and about a dozen historic sites also closed until June, or until the state restores funding.

The future of those cuts and any future cuts are in question after federal authorities arrested Blagojevich on corruption charges in December.

Whether the governor would step aside or whether the state legislature or Supreme Court would act to remove him from office was unknown at press time.

One thing is clear, however. The governor's arrest made an already challenging economic situation even more complicated with so many unknowns about the future of the state's leadership.

Alternative coping methods for the state include partnering with businesses to deliver government services. The city of Chicago last month went as far as leasing its parking meters to a private company for an up-front \$1.2 billion.

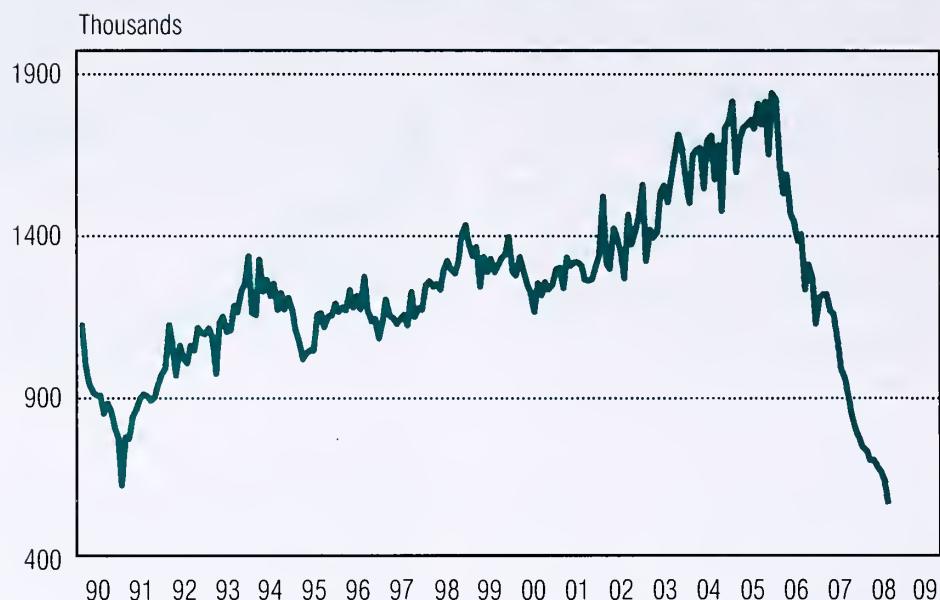
However, previous attempts to privatize state assets have failed in the legislature and have been rejected by the courts.

Giertz, the University of Illinois economist, says Illinois may fare no better or worse than other states in the national recession, but its consumers may not see relief until the federal government enacts another stimulus package or until the state undertakes a major capital program to start road and school construction projects.

Blagojevich seeks as much as \$3 billion in federal aid during the next three years. He flew to Philadelphia last month to join other governors to make a case to President-elect Barack Obama for federal assistance.

## New privately owned housing starts

### Single family



Source: Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability

"President-elect Barack Obama has indicated that he's interested in a federal stimulus plan that would help the states, as well," says Katie Ridgway, spokeswoman for Blagojevich's office. "And we believe that our proposals not only help our budget but also help stimulate our economy by stimulating consumer spending and investing in infrastructure."

Before his arrest, Blagojevich wanted to borrow money, withhold more state funds and continue to trim expenses.

Calling his plan the "Emergency Budget Act," Blagojevich sought authority to withhold as much as 8 percent of general revenue funds in reserve. That would expand a governor's power to withhold money from state agencies, primary education, higher education, state pension funds and local governments. The reserves would be on top of the 3 percent Blagojevich already withheld from many service providers last year.

The legislature shot down the plan last fall, and the impeachment process has

distracted lawmakers from preparing for the next fiscal year.

There is, however, renewed hope within the Statehouse that the General Assembly, with the help of two new Senate leaders and potentially a new governor, might agree on ways to fund a long-awaited capital program. Finding a way to finance the construction projects will prove just as difficult, if not more, than last year's politically heated efforts, given the difficult economic conditions.

The Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability also warns that a state public works program might not start to stimulate the economy until 2011, too late to help get through fiscal year 2010. A capital bill also wouldn't help ease many of the state's operating costs.

With such ominous projections of decreasing revenue, backlogged bills and increasing spending pressures, the state has a real mess, Long says.

To state officials and consumers: Find a way to relax because "it's going to be a very difficult year." □

# Power of the joke

Funny political pundits do more than make us laugh

by John Carpenter

Putting aside the historic significance of the election of Barack Obama, both to African-Americans and Illinoisans, the run-up to the 2008 presidential election could hardly be described as anything but depressing. Republicans seemed either quietly resigned to their fate or desperately stuffing any available scrap into their campaign cannons and blasting away. Hopeful Democrats shrank from their confidence, weary from a barrage of attacks and mindful of recent late collapses. American soldiers were still dying in two wars while the economy lurched to a smoke-belching halt, pinning jobs and home values and retirement accounts and college savings under its hulking wreckage. And all the while, our own president seemed to have cleaned his desk sometime in mid-October, showing himself only for occasional fruitless attempts to calm the plunging markets.

Here's the thing, though. In spite of the drumbeat of bad news — or maybe in some strange way because of it — we were laughing our butts off.

The events unfolding around us were so bizarre, so unlike anything we've experienced, that comedians seemed to be the only ones who could bring things into focus. Volumes will continue to be written about the presidency of George W. Bush. Still more will come out about what finally made America ready for an African-American president. But it only took comedian Chris Rock 17 words, one of which we politely changed, to get to

the point. Bush, he observed, “[screwed] up everything so much, he's even made it hard for a white man to become president.”

History will clearly and properly name the first election of an African-American president as the lasting achievement of 2008. But at or near the top of the also-ran events must be the emergence of humor into the mainstream of political discourse. Political satire is a time-honored tradition in this country, from newspaper cartoonists and columnists to stand-up comedians to great literary figures such as Mark Twain. We have always enjoyed poking fun at the powerful and the would-be powerful. A whole chapter of Chicago history takes its name from comedian Aaron Freeman. His wildly popular “Council Wars” stage show made us laugh, and think, about the bitter political battles that followed the election of Harold Washington, the city's first African-American mayor, more than 25 years ago.

Heck, you can find political jokes in Shakespeare and Aristophanes.

But all of the aforementioned practitioners plied their trade at the edges of the political scene. In 2008, the jesters were center stage or close to it. No one will ever know exactly how many votes were changed by this joke on *Saturday Night Live*, or that video montage of campaign flip-flops on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. But the millions of people who watched those programs, along with millions more YouTube addicts and e-mail joke forwarders, tell us that hearty doses of satire and irony were part of the daily nutrition for a large portion of political consumers.

Like most trends these days, this one starts with technology. The explosion of high-speed Internet connections and ubiquitous viewing devices put an almost infinite number of comedy platforms in the hands of millions. *The Onion*, once a quirky little publication handed out in a few college towns, is now a highly polished, scathingly hilarious Web site that claims about 3 million visitors a week. And countless other sites of varying degrees of quality and polish are buzzing around it. That means people who used to stand near the copy machine lamely trying to retell a comedy bit or describe a political cartoon now call people over to their cubicles and click “play,” showing off the latest offering from JibJab.com, or last night's *Daily Show* monologue. Even people who don't want the stuff are inundated with e-mail attempts at levity.

Photograph courtesy of Aaron Freeman



Comedian Aaron Freeman

Last year's Tina Fey phenomenon, for example, is generally looked at as a landmark television event. To be sure, when the former *Saturday Night Live* writer and performer made her return to the program for several sketches as Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin, she breathed life into the flagging show. Ratings soared by more than 75 percent from the year before. And the episode that featured Palin herself, as well as Fey as Palin, was the highest rated *Saturday Night Live* show in 14 years, drawing more than 17 million viewers. But that was just the start.

Video clips of sketches were uploaded to the Internet almost instantly, and people began watching on their computers and phones. Given the nature of cyberspace, it is virtually impossible to know how many times those clips have been copied and viewed all over the Internet. But I visited YouTube, the time-devouring, productivity-sapping, insanely popular video-sharing site, in late November. I typed "tina fey as sarah palin on snl" (*Saturday Night Live*) in the search box and more than 1,500 video clips emerged immediately. Alongside each clip is the screen name of the person who uploaded it and the number of times it has been viewed. I have no idea who apguitarguy401 is and what he has accomplished in his life. But I can tell you that the Fey clip he uploaded to YouTube in October has been viewed almost 8 million times. I scrolled through the first 40 Tina Fey clips and calculated that as of that date, they had been viewed more than 36 million times.

Clearly Fey's impersonations of Palin reached a massive audience. But did they hurt or help the McCain-Palin effort? Many comedians downplay the real impact of their work on election outcomes.

"I've never felt any of us had significant influence," *Doonesbury* creator Garry Trudeau said in a *Washington Post* article published June 12, 2008. "For something to be funny, the audience has to be in a position to sense the truth of it. It has to be primed. Satire can crystallize what's already in the air, but it can't really put it there."

*Image courtesy of the Library of Congress*



But University of Iowa professor Russell L. Peterson suggested in the same article that comedians have a vested interest in downplaying their influence. They "have a good reason for being disingenuous. Their comic license depends on them denying" their power to change voting minds.

Jon Stewart, whose popular *The Daily Show* was at the heart of comedic politic discourse in 2008, routinely dismisses his importance, reminding people that he is a comedian first and a commentator second. But a study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that he tied for fourth on the list of America's "most admired news figures," behind only Katie Couric, Bill O'Reilly and Charles Gibson. Stewart was tied with Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, Brian Williams and Anderson Cooper, and ahead of Jim Lehrer, Bob Woodruff,

Peter Jennings, Walter Cronkite, Matt Lauer, Rush Limbaugh, Wolf Blitzer and Ted Koppel, among others.

*Chicago Tribune* columnist and longtime political observer Eric Zorn thinks political comedy does more than just make people laugh.

"I believe that comedy does shape the narrative of the campaign and the image of candidates — a belief that I admit doesn't seem to be backed up by any research — and does not simply reflect reality on the ground," Zorn told me.

Citing several Web sites that track political jokes, Zorn says Palin's image evolved as the focus of jokes about her shifted.

"If you go back and look at the first week or so of jokes about her ... you'll see they were comparatively gentle and seemed to be about hockey moms, pit bulls, pregnant daughters and so on," he says. "But soon enough, they began playing on how aggressively, cheerfully clueless she was, or certainly appeared to be, about almost every issue, and how flimsy her résumé was. And that image of her settled with a great number of voters. Tina Fey played a big role in that."

Indeed, Palin was an unknown when McCain chose her to be his running mate. And her few attempts at the kind of

interviews that typically allow people to get to know a candidate went so poorly that the biographical picture of her that emerged was strongly influenced, if not dominated, by the Fey caricature. Whether this was fair or not is anyone's guess. One thing that is hard to deny, though, is that the most popular humor this election cycle was playing to Democrats at the expense of Republicans.

Audiences of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* skew significantly to the left, according to a Pew Research Center study released last August. Those audiences are also younger than average, Pew found. Much has been made of the fact that 16 percent

of Americans polled said they considered those shows as a regular news source. Some say that is troubling (though one could argue that 71 percent of respondents listing local TV news as one of their main sources is far more troubling). But a look at the numbers suggests that the people who called *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* a news source are people who gather information from a large number of places. These audiences "tend to be fairly omnivorous

in their consumption — an average of seven separate sources for regular news," compared with an overall average of 4.6, according to the Pew report. That study gave respondents a public affairs test, grading them on their level of news knowledge. The highest scoring audiences in terms of the knowledge of current affairs belonged to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, along with "major TV news Web sites." Bill O'Reilly, host of the popular Fox News talker *The O'Reilly Factor* — which also

scored high in terms of audience knowledge of current events — might want to rethink his repeated sneer, in a 2004 interview with Stewart, that *The Daily Show* audience consisted of "stoned slackers."

Oddly, the Fox News Channel, home to O'Reilly's show, claimed one of the lowest scoring audience-knowledge averages, tied with local TV news and just above network morning shows, whose audiences had the least knowledge of current events.

The fact that audiences for those political comedy shows are highly knowledgeable about current affairs may play into the suggestion that comedians are

also tries to gather information about those viewers. In late October 2008, Nielsen released data on "engagement," defined as the amount of attention paid to a television program by the average viewer. Researchers determined the level of engagement by quizzing viewers on details of the shows they had watched. They also sorted the data by self-identified Democrats and Republicans. The cable television series that scored the highest engagement among Democrats was *The Colbert Report*. The series with the highest level of audience engagement among Republicans was *South Park*, an off-beat animation series known for its scatological humor.

Given the historically low favorability ratings for George Bush, Republicans may have resigned themselves to defeat in 2008, hence their engagement in fart jokes rather than political satire. Clearly, though, the frustrated and energized Democrats were hungry for the latter.

"Given their angst and frustration," Thomas Schaller wrote on Election Day for Salon.com, "it is no surprise that liberals have been enjoying the loudest (and last?)

*Image courtesy of the Library of Congress*



not driving opinions but rather tapping into, and perhaps focusing, thoughts and feelings that are already there. It may also simply be that the people out of power — Democrats, when it came to the presidency — were more motivated this election season and thus ready to consume not just news but news-driven satire. Here a Nielsen study is telling.

The television ratings firm measures more than just how many homes are tuned in to a given show — the baseline "ratings" that drive advertising rates. It

laughs during our current, pioneering age of dark, ironic humor. The chuckles produced during the George W. Bush era by a veritable legion of satirists and comedians, ranging from Tina Fey to Jon Stewart to Chris Rock, have been particularly therapeutic. Unfunny times demand the tonic of humorous distraction."

*New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani agreed in an August 2008 article that asked, "Is Jon Stewart the most trusted man in America?"

"*The Daily Show* resonates not only because it is wickedly funny but also because its keen sense of the absurd is perfectly attuned to an era in which cognitive dissonance has become a national epidemic."

There was a time when a late-night cable television show, however funny and engaging, could never hope to attract meaningful audiences in the context of a national political campaign. *The Daily Show* audiences have been building since 1999, when Stewart took over as host and he and producers moved the focus from entertainment to politics. Its audiences now rival "serious" cable news talk shows. And Stewart's October 29 interview of now President-elect Barack Obama drew more than 3.6 million viewers, the show's largest audience ever. Comedy Central hit a relative jackpot on election night, with a special hosted by Stewart and Stephen Colbert, the fictional conservative talk show host played by the comedic actor of the same name. *Indecision 2008: America's Choice* averaged 3.1 million viewers. That didn't come close to the 12-plus million viewers watching each of the top three ratings grabbers — ABC, CNN and NBC — that night. But it was at least within shouting distance of MSNBC (5.9 million viewers). And it was certainly a respectable showing for a fake news show on one of the biggest real news nights in recent history.

Stewart himself, discussing the Sarah Palin phenomenon in an interview with EW.com, the Web site for *Entertainment Weekly*, hit upon a significant reason why his and other satire shows have struck such a powerful chord.

"Everyone likes new and shiny," he said of Palin. "We're bored. What's great about that is [Democratic vice presidential nominee Joe] Biden is an absolutely eccentric character. That's how powerful the Palin story is. It has cast the first African-American presidential nominee, the oldest [non-incumbent] presidential nominee, and a really wild-cork vice presidential candidate completely out of the picture. The press is 6-year-olds playing soccer. Nobody has a position. It's just: 'Where's the ball? Where's the ball?' Sarah Palin has the ball!"

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***Stewart feeds on that image of the national media as bumbling clowns in some massively hyped news circus. His correspondents didn't just crack jokes at the national conventions. They covered the news from the "Daily Show news-scraper — 117 stories, 73 situation rooms, 26 news tickers!" They promised, with dramatic musical flourish, to report the news "before it's even true."***

Stewart feeds on that image of the national media as bumbling clowns in some massively hyped news circus. His correspondents didn't just crack jokes at the national conventions. They covered the news from the "*Daily Show* news-scraper — 117 stories, 73 situation rooms, 26 news tickers!" They promised, with dramatic musical flourish, to report the news "before it's even true!"

Colbert, operating in his strange, created, alternative universe, takes the silliness to a new level, shredding bombastic, fawning conservative pundits along the way. John McCain, he declared, is a "hope-ra-naut. He's in a rarefied level of hope where the rest of us have to take tanks up with us." In one of the more surreal moments of the political comedic season, Colbert appeared as a guest on Bill O'Reilly's show. O'Reilly seemed unsure of what to make of the situation, and uncomfortable as he discovered he was interviewing Colbert the character — specifically, Colbert, the O'Reilly-worshipping character — instead of Colbert the actor and comedian.

"What is it, exactly, that you do?" a strangely low-key O'Reilly asked.

"What I do, Bill," Colbert replied, not skipping a beat, "is catch the world in the headlights of my justice!"

Goofy lines like those make us laugh because they poke fun at the ridiculousness of so many screaming, ego-maniacal talk show hosts these days. But the more biting comedy may have wielded more influence.

One of Stewart's trademarks is the reaction to a video clip. His "moderation" of a debate, during the run-up to the Iraq war, between George Bush and George Bush, juxtaposing contradictory statements from the president, is a classic. But one of the most powerful — and funny — moments on *The Daily Show* in 2008 came when Stewart reacted to a Palin speech from Greensboro, N.C.

"The best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit," Palin said, "and in the wonderful little pockets of what I like to call real America, being here with all you. Hard-working. Very patriotic, very pro-America areas of this great nation."

When the clip ended, Stewart was looking down, his fingers pinched on the bridge of his nose. He rubbed his temples, as if fighting a headache, then looked at the camera, offering a forlorn sigh before speaking.

"What the [bleep]? So if small towns are real America, that would make big cities, like Washington, D.C., and New York City, the capitals of fake America, the epicenters of fake America, the, oh, what's the word I'm looking for? The Ground Zero, if you will, of anti-America! I bet bin Laden feels like a real [jerk] now! 'What?! I bombed the wrong America?!"

It was funny, to be sure. But it also spoke to millions of urban and suburban Democrats who clearly were tired of being tarred as somehow less than real Americans. More significantly, though, Palin quickly backed away from her remarks — comments of the kind that Republicans have made for years in similar rural stump speeches. That, more than anything, speaks volumes about the power of the joke in 2008. □

*John Carpenter is a former Chicago Sun-Times reporter now freelancing from his home in Michigan.*

# Bad news for journalism

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## Newspapers are struggling in the Internet age

by Kristy Kennedy

**C**hicago Tribune executives won't be surprised if their coverage of Barack Obama's history-making inauguration sells out.

More than a week after the November election, people still lined up in the *Tribune* lobby to buy a piece of history they could hold in their hands — a copy of the newspaper proclaiming Barack Obama as the next president of the United States.

Television and radio reporters talked about the run on newspapers as a nod to nostalgia. This is no surprise. It is a scary time for newspapers.

Consider that while news is in hot demand, the Tribune Co. (owner of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* — both in the top eight of the highest circulated papers in the country) filed for bankruptcy protection, citing sagging revenues and difficulty managing debt because of the credit crisis. The filing is the biggest flare yet signaling an industry in decline.

Other signals from the last couple of years: The *Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times* have slashed their staffs and reduced the physical size of their papers by trimming edges and the number of pages. The suburban Chicago *Daily Herald* has cut salaries, imposed a hiring freeze and, a little more than a year ago, had the first layoffs in the history of the family-owned newspaper. The *State Journal-Register* in Springfield and the Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette* have shrunk their news staffs, and the *News-Gazette* dropped its Springfield bureau.

Those changes are mirrored nationwide as newspapers struggle with the worst economy since the Depression and deterioration of the model they use to pay for their operations, as commercial and classified advertisers flee to the Internet. Add to that pressure over changes in the way people get their news.

A 2008 study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism reveals a portrait of the modern-day newspaper: staffing cutbacks, a smaller news hole, less foreign and national news and the collapse of sections covering specific beats such as business. All are the result of tumbling revenues.

How much of the downturn has been caused by the economy versus a shift in how people advertise and get their news is difficult — if not impossible — to determine.

A pessimist would say that newspapers are on their last legs. But optimistic editors and newspaper experts in Illinois say their business is in transition and that it is a time of opportunity.

"For many years we operated virtually like a monopoly," says Gerould W. Kern, senior vice president and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. "The cost of entry into this business was very high. You had to have a printing press, and few competitors could do that. Now, you can get your news while you are playing Guitar Hero on your Wii. There is tremendous opportunity to be innovative and to seize the moment."

Clearly, this is an age of information. News of any kind, from any corner of the world, has never been easier to get through legitimate news gathering organizations or informal blogs, says Rich Gordon, associate professor and director of digital media in education at Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. "I don't think the audience for news is shrinking," he says. "You can make a case that there is more news consumption than ever."

People want and need the news that has been offered traditionally by newspapers. But how to pay for it? That is the biggest question facing newsrooms in Illinois and across the nation. Newspaper executives are dealing with shrinking staffs, which affects not only the content of their papers but their ability to experiment with new platforms for delivering the news. Do they staff bureaus? Do they arm reporters with video cameras? Do they focus on the web or niche publications aimed at specific audiences like twenty-somethings?

In Illinois, editors are doing all of the above. They have been hit hard by the economy. "I've been in the business for 35 years, and this is the toughest climate I've ever seen," says John Lampinen, editor and senior vice president of the privately owned *Daily Herald*.

Falling stock prices of publicly traded companies bear out Lampinen's assessment. From 2005 to the end of 2007, newspaper shares cumulatively lost 42 percent of their value with that down-

ward trend continuing in 2008, according to a study by the Pew Research Center. Despite that report, most newspapers remain profitable, just not as profitable as they have been in the past, Gordon says, adding that some newspapers such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *The Boston Globe* have reported they are operating at a loss. "Even those that are profitable today are in danger of becoming unprofitable within the next few years if current trends in ad revenue hold," Gordon says. "Online advertising revenue is growing but is not making up for the decline in print advertising revenue."

Classifieds traditionally have made up one-third of newspaper revenue — with the bulk of them coming from businesses now facing economic crisis, such as auto dealers, real estate firms and job placement services, says John Foreman, publisher and president of the *News-Gazette*. "We've seen a real erosion of classifieds in the last year," he says. "It matters no difference how badly I want to provide news if I don't have a revenue source to pay the salaries of these reporters."

Declining revenues led Foreman to close his Springfield bureau. As is the case in all newsrooms, printing and distribution costs are more fixed than the costs of reporters' salaries. "It's more expensive to maintain a Statehouse bureau than a local reporter, and I'm not going to sacrifice news closer to home," Foreman says, adding that he can get state news from the wire service but can't cover the Champaign school board that way. "Every time we are confronted with the need to reduce editorial resources, we are challenged to do the job that I think is demanded by our constitutional responsibilities. What is the implication of that?"

Foreman isn't the only editor in Illinois making those tough decisions. The number of reporters in the Illinois Capitol pressroom has dropped, with the *Rockford Register Star* forgoing its bureau and the *Tribune*, AP and Small Newspaper Group among others cutting the size of their staffs. "The amount of news on Springfield has gone down," says Charles N. Wheeler III, director of the Public Affairs Reporting Program at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "It is really important for society not to lose the fruits of what good newspaper reporting provides."



*The Chicago Tribune is located at 435 N. Michigan Ave.*

And that involves important stories looking at serious topics such as education, health care and criminal justice by reporters who know their stuff and are seasoned enough to spot corruption and explain complex issues, says Ronald E. Yates, dean of the College of Media at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "It takes a lot of money and bodies to cover the news. You can't cover this country by sitting in front of a computer and doing it online," he says. "It means going out and talking to people. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversations about issues in a substantive way."

Yates, a former *Chicago Tribune* foreign correspondent, worries that world news is being pushed aside. "People all over the world know more about us than we do about them," he says. "Of all the countries covering the world, we should be doing more of it." The study by the Pew Research Center shows that Yates is right to worry; editors are focusing more on their own backyards as they have fewer resources. Larger newspapers and those owned by chains seem to be the hardest hit. At their peak, some newspapers in the late 1990s were making as much as 30 percent profit as investors wanted the papers streamlined, Northwestern's Gordon says. That leaves them more vulnerable today. "Now they are in the unfortunate position of cutting bone and not fat," Gordon says.

All newspapers are picking and choosing what to cover. From city councils to

townships to mosquito abatement districts, Illinois has more bodies of government than most other states. Providing news for about 80 different suburbs, *Daily Herald* reporters could spend all their time at government meetings. "With smaller resources, it is a huge challenge to maintain the quantity of news that we are covering," Lampinen says. "Find a newspaper in the state paying any attention to township government."

Staff cuts have led newspapers to become creative to provide some coverage cheaply. The *Daily Herald* has turned to community journalism. Rather than blanket suburban festivals with reporters this year, the paper collected basic information from organizers through questionnaires and then published the information. "Would we do that to find a scandal where festival people are absconding with money? No," Lampinen says. "But for dates and other information, it was a pretty good tool." The *Tribune* also has turned to community journalism by putting out a weekly insert on specific suburbs that is mostly written by public relations staff from businesses and government agencies.

Newspapers are doing the best they can with what they've got. Although the *State Journal-Register* has made staffing cuts, the paper still has its editorial cartoonist, an important asset for Springfield, says Executive Editor Jon Broadbooks. "We're being judicious, but we haven't taken core features away from readers," he says.

To go along with its smaller size, the *Chicago Tribune* updated its look this fall with a bold redesign that Kern calls more than "just a redecoration." The paper took research from readers to heart. Kern says he found that people want an emotional and intellectual connection with their newspaper. "We really changed the philosophy of the paper," he says. "It is grounded in what we've learned from readers." The paper has placed more of an emphasis on enterprise stories and watchdog reporting, along with offering consumers information they can put to use. "We want readers to be excited with their encounter with the newspaper. To be informed, enlightened, provoked and entertained," Kern says. "We don't want them to leave here unmoved."

And to drive home the *Tribune's* commitment to news gathering, the paper added a slogan at the bottom of its flashy, new masthead: "The Midwest's largest reporting team."

Because newspapers have the largest teams of news gatherers around, they often drive the news coverage on radio, television and even on the Internet. It is one of the things that may give newspapers staying power. Another is the time readers spend with their newspapers — an average of 400 minutes a month, compared with 40 minutes a month on a newspaper Web site, Gordon says. "You can relax with a newspaper," Lampinen says. "We all lead these busy, frenetic lives. If you stop and think how you read a newspaper, it

becomes a part of your day. It's the biggest asset that newspapers have and one that we fail to promote."

Web traffic on the *Herald's* site gives executives an idea of what stories are generating the most interest. Not surprisingly, crime stories are popular, but Lampinen says people need to read about issues they might not seek out, such as poverty. There is a danger in giving readers all they want. It is easier for them to avoid stories they should read, says Yates, who refers to those stories as "spinach journalism." But other experts say there are ways to slip the spinach into publications that readers will like.

Critics told Jane Hirt, founding editor of *RedEye* and current managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, that young people didn't read newspapers. So, she pitched a newspaper for 18- to 30-year-olds who didn't read them. "It's how you serve it up," she says of the Tribune-owned paper. *RedEye* is heavy on commuter stories and partying and is structured to be read in 20 minutes. But the paper slips in hard news from the *Tribune* and also delves into more serious issues — covering a serial rapist when other dailies weren't paying much attention and looking at the effect that bottled water has on the environment. "Even though *RedEye* is a rollicking good time, it does give good coverage of a more serious nature," Hirt says. "Readers are hungry for the news that newspapers have."

*RedEye* is a success story. After six years, the free paper, which is published

six days a week, is turning a profit and has a circulation of 200,000. The Tribune Co. also owns *Hoy*, the second-largest Spanish-language paper in the United States.

*The State Journal-Register* publishes monthly papers aimed at seniors and business people. "(Niche publications) all add to the ability to meet and reach readers in the market," Broadbooks says. "We're mass media in a market that increasingly is not mass media."

Newspaper experts say they don't know what the future looks like for their businesses. In 1975, Yates covered the fall of Saigon with a typewriter and a 35-millimeter camera. Today, newspaper reporters on the other side of the world can scoop television on breaking stories with video and satellite phones.

The future could be a device like the popular Kindle (a magazine-thin piece of electronic equipment that owners use to read downloaded books) or a special paper with computer chips that will feature news that can be changed and updated. There also is some promise in increasing ad revenue by partnering newspapers with search engines like Yahoo! to connect advertisers with local customers. Yahoo! already has started that endeavor with a newspaper consortium.

It is a time of transition, of uncertainty.

"The industry needs a lot of hope right now," Lampinen says. "We need to know that we're going to get through this. We've got to remind ourselves that we do good work that has good value. There will always be a place for that."

If those people in the *Tribune* lobby had looked up after buying their "Obama wins" paper, they would have noticed that they weren't just in any old lobby. Known as the Hall of Inscriptions, the soaring space features inspiring quotations by the likes of Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire and the *Tribune's* legendary publisher, Col. Robert R. McCormick.

With any luck, newspapers will be as enduring as McCormick's words: "A newspaper is an institution developed by modern civilization to present the news of the day, to foster commerce and industry, to inform and lead public opinion, and to furnish that check upon government which no constitution has ever been able to provide." □

Kristy Kennedy is a Naperville-based freelance writer.



The Chicago Sun-Times is now housed inside the Merchandise Mart building.

# What's next?

Voters killed the constitutional convention, but lawmakers are likely to revive some reforms

by Scott Reeder

Just about every major interest group in Springfield opposed drafting a new state Constitution, a sentiment affirmed in November by voters who rejected the idea by a ratio of more than 2-1.

Despite the vote, there still appears to be a healthy appetite for making smaller changes to the document. But the political prognosis for amending the Constitution is uncertain at best.

"Folks who opposed a constitutional convention said that reform could happen by simply amending the Constitution. I guess now is the time to see if they were serious about that or if they were just making excuses for not having a constitutional convention," says Bruno Behrend, co-founder of the Illinois Citizens Coalition, which advocated for a constitutional convention.

Another supporter of a convention — former state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka — responds to Behrend's skepticism about future constitutional reform after the Con-Con defeat with outright cynicism.

She describes efforts to bring political reform through amending the Constitution as fruitless.

The former GOP gubernatorial candidate's reason for her grim forecast is simple: Changing the Constitution is largely in the hands of those who have succeeded politically under the current Constitution.

There are two paths to amending the state Constitution:

- Three-fifths of the Illinois House and Senate have to vote to place the issue

on the ballot, where it must be approved by 60 percent of those voting.

- If the amendment is related to changing the structure or procedure of the legislature, it can be placed on the ballot without a legislative vote through a petition drive collecting signatures equal to 8 percent of those voting in the most recent gubernatorial election. It must then be approved by 60 percent of those voting.

The legislature's role in screening constitutional amendments to present to the voters stands as the greatest impediment to meaningful constitutional reform, Topinka says.

"Come on, do you really think these guys are going to vote to put restrictions on their own power? They could have passed a constitutional amendment for political reform anytime in the last 20 years — but they haven't," she says.

Still, some lawmakers, such as state Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat, continue to seek reform.

"I'm going to reintroduce the recall amendment next year," Franks says. "I think with a new Senate president, it has a good chance of passing."

Earlier this year, the House approved and the Senate rejected placing on the ballot a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed voters to give themselves the power to recall elected officials from office.

When it was debated in the legislature it was widely considered a referendum on Gov. Rod Blagojevich's performance.

"The governor said he favored the recall amendment but then lobbied aggressively behind the scenes against it, and his ally [Senate President] Emil Jones helped him defeat the bill. With Emil leaving and new leadership coming in, I think there is a good chance we can pass this and get it on the ballot," says Franks, who also pushed to hold a constitutional convention.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn agrees that a recall amendment stands a good chance for passage if voters are given a chance to weigh in on it.

"I think a very healthy majority of voters are in favor of recall. It's a very strong tonic or prescription for whatever ails Illinois government," he says. "If the public has the power to recall, I think a lot of the daily abuses we see in Illinois state government will come to an end."

Other than a recall amendment, however, Franks says many constitutional reforms simply cannot succeed without a constitutional convention.

"I'd like to see term limits imposed on how long someone can serve as a legislative leader, but if I were to introduce that legislatively, it would never make it out of the Rules Committee."

"I'd also like to see something done with redistricting. Half of the people in the legislature don't have opposition in elections, and many of the rest only have nominal opposition," Franks says. "Legislative districts have been gerrymandered to the point that voters aren't choosing legislators. Legislators are choosing their voters."

But Franks says short of a constitutional convention, reforms such as creating computer models to enhance competitiveness in legislative districts simply won't happen.

"Come on, it's all about protecting incumbents. People aren't going to vote to make their jobs more vulnerable during the next election."

One area of the persistent legislative gripes about the state Constitution centers on the governor's power to rewrite legislation through his amendatory veto powers.

"When the Illinois Constitution was drafted, the idea was that this would only be used to correct scrivener errors or merge two similar bills, not wholesale rewrites of legislation, as this governor has done," Franks says.

A constitutional amendment restricting the governor's power to redraft legislation may have potential for implementation, Quinn says. But he adds that although he supports such a constitutional change, it would not be a top priority for him.

Franks sees little potential for such a measure to gain political traction with voters.

"It's very much 'inside baseball,'" he says.

Quinn agrees, adding that much of the controversy stems from the vague wording in the 1970 state Constitution. "It's poorly worded. In the hands of Gov. Blagojevich, it has the potential of nullifying the will of the legislature."

Of course, no public policy debate would be complete in Illinois without pondering taxation.

The state now taxes its residents' incomes at a 3 percent rate, regardless of how much they earn. The state Constitution mandates a flat-rate income tax, which some contend places too much of a burden on the poor and middle class to finance state services.

Among the concerns is that a disproportionate share of the state's overall income growth has come from upper-income taxpayers. By taxing everyone at the same rate, regardless of their income, state government is not receiving revenue proportionate to the statewide income growth.

A constitutional amendment creating a progressive income tax to replace the existing flat rate also has potential for passing, says Ralph Martire, executive director of the Chicago-based Center for Tax and Budget Accountability.

A progressive income tax would mean upper-income individuals would pay a higher percentage of their earnings to the state than those who earn less.

"There is a growing recognition that the state's fiscal system is so badly broken that fixing it is on the agenda for everyone in both parties. One way of fixing it is to create a progressive tax rate structure that allows the flexibility for the tax system to respond to how economic growth gets shared across different income classes."

In addition to revising the way state taxes are structured, the Constitution should be amended to clearly define state government's responsibilities — particularly toward education, says state Rep. Careen Gordon, a Democrat from Coal City.

Article 10 of the state Constitution says, "The State has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education." But Gordon noted that even almost 40 years after the Constitution was implemented, that provision has not been interpreted to the satisfaction of those who believe the state should pay for at least 51 percent of the cost of funding schools.

Another area in which the state should consider constitutionally defining its financial obligations is pensions for state workers, teachers and public employees, contends state Sen. Bill Brady, a Bloomington Republican.

"This is just a farce, the way we fund pensions in the state of Illinois," Brady says. "We have tried to solve this problem legislatively and it hasn't worked. Now we need to address it constitutionally. The Constitution should require that pensions be fully funded. We owe it to our pensioners and our taxpayers."

Brady, a GOP gubernatorial hopeful, says he hopes to push for a constitutional amendment that would allow actuaries working for the state's pension boards to determine how much money the state sets aside annually to fully fund pensions.

In other states, such as California, much of the attention toward changing the Constitution has focused on social issues, particularly banning same-sex marriage.

In fact, since 1996, 30 states have amended their constitutions to prevent same-sex couples from marrying.

But Illinois social conservatives have made little headway in their attempts to pass an amendment to the state Constitu-

## The question

Voters were asked whether they wanted the state to conduct a constitutional convention. The last such convention was held in 1969-'70, and a new Constitution was adopted in 1970. That Constitution requires voters to be asked every 10 years whether they want another convention.

## Vote totals

Yes: 1,493,203

No: 3,062,724

Total ballots cast: 5,539,172

All 102 counties in Illinois:  
Where the referendum was rejected

Source: Illinois State Board of Elections

tion to define marriage as only between one man and one woman.

"They won't even let it have a hearing in a legislative committee," said David Smith, executive director of the Illinois Family Institute. "The reason is clear: Legislative leaders are driven by political correctness and don't want this matter heard."

For Rick Garcia, political director for the gay rights group Equality Illinois, the reason the proposed constitutional amendment languishes in committee is simple: politics.

"These amendments are put on the ballot all over the country as a way to get socially conservative voters to polling places where they will vote for the amendment — and for conservative candidates," he says. "I believe that is why the Democratic leaders in both the House and Senate don't want this on the ballot — because they fear it will hurt their legislative candidates, not because they want same-sex marriage."

Charles N. Wheeler III, director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield, columnist for *Illinois Issues* and a longtime observer of state government, says the issue goes beyond political calculations.

"Illinois is a moderate state and really doesn't have much stomach for these types of measures." □

Scott Reeder is Statehouse bureau chief for the Small Newspaper Group.

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D. Renee Schroeder	Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP	Rockford	815.490.4921
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Clayton L. Lindsey	WilliamsMcCarthy LLP	Oregon	815.732.2101
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Thomas F. Bennington, Jr.	Chuhak & Tecson PC	Chicago	312.444.9300
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Clare Connor Ranalli	Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP	Chicago	312.704.3253
Robert T. Shannon	Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP	Chicago	312.704.3901
Matthew J. Piers	Hughes Socol Piers Resnick & Dym Ltd	Chicago	312.604.2606
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Terrence M. Barnicle	Klein Thorpe and Jenkins Ltd	Chicago	312.984.6400
Thomas P. Bayer	Klein Thorpe and Jenkins Ltd	Chicago	312.984.6400
Everette M. Hill, Jr.	Klein Thorpe and Jenkins Ltd	Chicago	312.984.6400
Daniel J. Kubasiak	Kubasiak Fylstra Thorpe & Rotunno PC	Chicago	312.630.9600
Jeremy D. Margolis	Loeb & Loeb LLP	Chicago	312.464.3167
Michael V. Favia	Michael V Favia Law Office	Chicago	773.631.4580
Stephen Scott Morrill	Morrill and Associates PC	Chicago/Springfield	312.606.8770
Terrance L. Diamond	Neal & Leroy LLC	Chicago	312.641.7144
Langdon D. Neal	Neal & Leroy LLC	Chicago	312.641.7144
Jeanette Sublett	Neal & Leroy LLC	Chicago	312.641.7144
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## Chicago schools chief will head education

**Arne Duncan**, chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools, has been named U.S. secretary of education by President-elect **Barack Obama**.

Meanwhile, in November, Obama tapped U.S. Rep **Rahm Emanuel**, a Chicago Democrat, to become his chief of staff. Emanuel was chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee for the 2006 election.

Duncan joined the public school system — the nation's third-largest with more than 435,000 students — in 1998 and became CEO in 2001. Previously, Duncan directed the Ariel Education Initiative, which aims to create educational opportunities for children on the South Side of Chicago.

## The transition team

President-elect **Barack Obama** has picked the brains of numerous people with Illinois ties. His presidential transition team has been charged with helping him develop his agenda to revitalize the economy, end the war in Iraq, provide near-universal health care, protect against terrorism at home and repair international relations. Co-chair **John Podesta** graduated from Knox College in Galesburg. He's founder and president of the Center for American Progress. He was chief of staff for former President Bill Clinton. Co-chair

**Valerie Jarrett** is president and chief executive officer of The Habitat Co., a real estate development and management firm based in Chicago. She is the former deputy chief of staff for Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. Board member **William Daley** is brother of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. He is vice chairman of JPMorgan Chase & Co. He was U.S. Secretary of Commerce under Clinton. **Christopher Koch**, the Illinois superintendent of schools, serves on the Council of Chief State School Officers Presidential Transition Task Force.

## OBIT

### Studs Terkel

He lived nearly a century and spent at least half of it recording the history of the American — often particularly Chicagoan — character. Yet, he missed by just a few days witnessing a fellow Chicagoan make history by being elected our next president. By all accounts, he would have loved to have been in Grant Park with his tape recorder collecting stories from everyday “uncelebrated” Americans gathered together on an unusually warm November evening to be part of a sea change in this country’s politics.

But like Barack Obama’s grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, and Sen. Dick Durbin’s daughter Christine, who also would have held places of honor at the celebration, Studs Terkel died just days before, on October 31. He was 96.

Born Louis Terkel in New York, he came to Chicago with his parents when he was 8. He earned a degree from the University of Chicago Law School, but he never practiced. Instead, he became



Studs Terkel

an actor and a writer. During the Depression, he worked on the Federal Writers’ Project and had parts in soap operas. He adopted his nickname from James T. Farrell’s character, Studs Lonigan, the South Side tough guy.

He joined the Army Air Corps and entertained troops during World War II. Afterward, he got job at WFMT, a classical radio station, where he played music, read short stories and hosted documentaries. His show lasted 46 years, until

## QUOTEABLE

“I’ve got this thing. And it’s bleeping golden. I’m just not giving it up for bleeping nothing. I’m not going to do it. I can always use it. I can parachute me there,” quote. Those are his words, not our characterization, other than with regards to the bleeps.”

*U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald at a press conference about his arrest of Gov. Rod Blagojevich. The quote refers to the governor discussing whether he should appoint himself to the U.S. Senate seat vacated by the president-elect.*

1998. In the McCarthy era, he was blacklisted as an actor, an experience he credited with making him a writer.

He perfected the use of a tape recorder, which in the early days was a cumbersome reel-to-reel, to collect oral histories. His first major work was *Division Street America*, published in 1966. Other books followed: *Hard Times* in 1970, *Working* in 1974, *Talking to Myself* in 1977 and *American Dreams: Lost and Found* in 1980. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1985 for *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*. His last book, *P.S. — Further Thoughts from a Lifetime of Listening*, was published the Monday after his death.

Yet, he told former *Illinois Issues* reporter Aaron Chambers (December 2001, page 30) that he didn’t want to be called an oral historian.

“I’m a whatnot,” he said. “A whatnot is a piece of furniture in which you put everything — letters, notes, telephone conversations, anything. I’m a whatnot, a two-legged whatnot. I still call myself a disc jockey.”

## People on the move

• **Bob Greenlee** resigned as one of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's deputy governors the day after the governor was arrested on federal corruption charges. Greenlee held the position for about six months but previously served in numerous administrative positions, including deputy director of the governor's budget office.

• **David Dring**, spokesman for House Minority Leader Tom Cross, will step down this month to join the well-connected lobbying firm of Fletcher, Topol, O'Brien & Kasper based in Chicago. "I thought it was time for me to pursue other avenues but stay involved in the process," Dring says. The firm represents clients ranging from education and the arts to telecommunications, including such high-profile companies as AT&T.

• **Mike Claffey** is acting director of the state's Central Management Services, where he oversees agency spokespeople and multimedia services through the Office of Communications and Information. He was spokesman for the Illinois Department of Transportation since 2003.

• **Marcelyn Love** is now spokeswoman for the governor's budget office. She's represented various state agencies to the media, most recently the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

• **Kelly Jakubek** transitioned from being an assistant to the governor's press office to a spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health. She's based in Chicago and replaces **Kimberly Parker**, who is now spokes-

woman for the Department on Aging.

• **Alka Nayyar**, former spokeswoman for the Department of Employment Security, is now spokeswoman for Central Management Services. **Greg Rivara** took her place at Employment Security.

• **Louis Pukelis** is spokesman for the state's economic development agency, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. He arrived from a public relations firm.

• **David Rudduck** moved from the governor's press office to the Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

• **Stacey Solano** is a new spokeswoman for the departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources. She's based in Springfield.

## The Filan factor



John Filan

Illinois wants to be well-positioned January 21 to help kick off President-elect Barack Obama's energy plans, which he hopes will rekindle the economy and recoup some job losses.

John Filan, the new executive director of the Illinois Finance Authority, says his role is to assure private investors that Illinois should be one of the first places to look for energy and agricultural investments as Obama's plans roll out.

The Illinois Finance Authority traditionally helps health care providers, manufacturers, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions access capital for expansion projects. It doesn't buy or sell bonds. It issues them, including tax-exempt bonds that tend to have lower interest rates.

The self-funded state agency was created in 2004, when Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration combined several bonding authorities to help carry out his economic development agenda.

Two priorities this year are promoting Illinois' natural resources and agriculture to help develop energy independence, Filan says, particularly as Obama vows to create 2.5 million jobs and invest in energy projects within his first two years in office.

"It will be a challenge, but we think with a new president's commitment to energy, that will be a strong thing in our favor, along with the IFA's resources and a lot of equity money that's looking for a place to invest," Filan says.

In fact, one energy project in particular could top the to-do list of Illinois' congressional delegation this year. The internationally recognized FutureGen power plant, formerly slated for Mattoon in east central Illinois, stalled under President George Bush's administration last year because cost estimates ballooned to about \$1.8 billion. It would require a combination of federal funds, state financing and private investments to build a plant that uses state-of-the art technology for cleaner energy production.

Another would build a \$2.5 billion clean-coal power plant in central Illinois

near Taylorville. But before the Nebraska-based Tenaska Inc. can break ground, it has to conduct a \$24 billion cost and design study for legislative review. The Illinois Finance Authority would help finance about \$18 million for the study if the governor signs legislation that was on his desk in mid-December.

Both projects are prime examples of the potential to coordinate the public and private sectors, says Filan, one of Blagojevich's advisers on so-called public-private partnerships.

Filan was Blagojevich's first budget director in 2003, when he had to figure out how to dig Illinois out of a \$5 billion budget deficit without raising general state taxes, as the governor promised. He pitched less traditional and often controversial approaches, including privatizing state assets, borrowing money to pay long-term pension debt and skimming unspent money from hundreds of the state's dedicated funds to help the state operate. He also reduced state head count and consolidated agency functions.

He most recently was the state's chief financial officer, a new position created in January 2007. He oversaw economic development, infrastructure, business regulation and environmental agencies, according the governor's office.

Bethany Jaeger



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## LETTERS

### Senator should be considered among list of next state leaders

I read your article on who'll step up to the plate as the state's next political leaders (see "On deck," September 2008, page 16). One glaring omission was Gov. Jim Edgar's former chief of staff, now state Sen. Kirk Dillard of Naperville.

The state's second-largest newspaper just opined, "Dillard has had a statewide resume for years," and *West Suburban Living* magazine's readers this spring voted him "Most Influential Area Resident" with former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert second. The *Chicago Sun-Times* said, "Dillard gets along with all types and factions."

Although a fiscally conservative pro-business Republican, Dillard appeals to Democrats and minorities, too. He

appeared in a Democratic primary ad for Barack Obama. Last summer, Dillard rode thousands of miles on a bus to the southern Civil Rights sites on a "Justice Journey" with members of the Rev. James Meeks' [state senator from Chicago] Salem Baptist Church. Sen. Dillard has sponsored most of the Campaign for Political Reform's ethics bills.

In 2006, when Sen. Dillard was chairman of the DuPage County Republican Party — in comparable elections — over 20,000 more voters took Republican primary ballots and 12,000 fewer Democrats cast ballots than when he assumed the DuPage GOP helm.

For these reasons, Sen. Dillard should be included as a viable candidate for statewide office.

Tom Althoff  
Lisle



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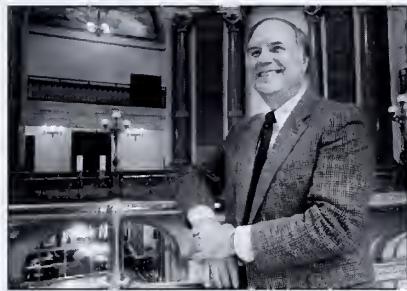
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*Charles N. Wheeler III*



## Pat Quinn as governor sounds pretty good now

by Charles N. Wheeler III

**P**at Quinn, governor of Illinois.

Thirty years ago, the notion that the gadfly populist someday would be the state's chief executive was laughable.

Traipsing around the state back then on a quixotic mission to change Illinois politics, Quinn was viewed widely as a burr under the saddle of the powers-that-be, but certainly not a serious prospect for high office.

Even after his 1990 election as state treasurer, political insiders still saw Quinn as the quintessential outsider, disliked by many for his role in cutting the size of the Illinois House by one-third.

Now as a new year dawns, many of those same politicos and pundits — along with a huge majority of the Illinois electorate — are greeting the idea of Quinn as the state's chief executive with the same kind of excitement and enthusiasm usually reserved for World Series winners.

While Quinn has performed ably as lieutenant governor over the last six years, that's hardly the reason for such unbridled joy. Rather, it's the guy Quinn is replacing, Rod Blagojevich, arguably the most corrupt (see the criminal complaint filed December 9 by federal prosecutors), least competent (read the auditor general's reports on his administration) governor in living memory.

"I never thought I'd say I'd sleep better

***Now as a new year dawns, many of those same politicos and pundits — along with a huge majority of the Illinois electorate — are greeting the idea of Quinn as the state's chief executive with the same kind of enthusiasm usually reserved for World Series winners.***

if Pat Quinn were governor," former Gov. Jim Edgar told a reporter shortly after criminal charges were filed against Blagojevich, neatly capturing the feelings of many who've watched Prairie State politics for years.

Once the euphoria wears off, though, what might one expect with a Gov. Quinn? How would a new chief executive and an incoming 96th General Assembly impact the long-standing dysfunction among the state's top leaders?

Perhaps the most significant change, one that could open the door to resolution of a host of vexing issues, is trust. Lawmakers may not like Quinn's maverick record or populist instincts, but they know they can accept his word as his

bond and not worry that he'll double-cross them when it suits his purposes.

Blagojevich lost that trust early in his first term, when he lied to state officials and lawmakers about budget cuts. That was the first step in souring his relationship with the legislature, and the following year, he was forced to sign memorandums of understanding — written guarantees that he wouldn't renege on his promises — to get a budget passed.

Without trust — the confidence that all parties will do what they commit to do — meaningful negotiations on difficult issues are impossible. For example, despite widespread consensus that a major public works program is needed, lawmakers have been wary of passing one because they haven't trusted Blagojevich to honor project commitments.

Legislators and Quinn certainly will differ on exactly what's going to be in a capital program. Quinn has argued for a greater commitment to environmentally friendly projects than included in pending legislation, but once a deal is struck, no one needs to worry whether Quinn will keep his word.

Moreover, look for Quinn to be less vindictive, less given to political retaliation, than his predecessor. Within days of Blagojevich's arrest, Quinn pledged to reopen state parks and historic sites Blagojevich closed, as well as to review

Blagojevich's plans to mothball Pontiac Correctional Center and to relocate a division of the state Transportation Department to southern Illinois from Springfield, decisions widely viewed as political retribution aimed at GOP senators.

In addition, Quinn will be more engaged with the General Assembly than his predecessor, reverting to the old pattern in which the governor and the legislative leaders actively seek good-faith compromises on major issues. That will be a welcome change from Blagojevich's penchant for remaining aloof throughout the spring session, then rewriting bills to suit his fancy and challenging lawmakers to accept his way or hit the highway. Quinn won't be a pushover, but neither will he demonize those who disagree with him in good faith.

Nor is Quinn likely to emulate Blagojevich's demagoguery on state finance. While Blagojevich's rhetoric has been staunch opposition to income and sales tax increases, he — with the complicity

of the legislature's Democratic majorities — has pushed spending higher each year he's been in office, relying on accounting gimmickry and fiscal sleight-of-hand to manage a widening deficit, headed toward \$4 billion at year's end.

Few knowledgeable people think Illinois can dig itself out of a hole that deep without some combination of tax increases and spending cuts. History suggests Quinn will be open to revisions to the state's tax structure and spending obligations. In 2004, for example, he pushed for higher income tax rates on the state's wealthiest taxpayers to boost school funding and reduce local property taxes. He also was a vocal opponent of Blagojevich's proposed \$6 billion tax on business revenues, arguing that consumers and small businesses would suffer.

As governor, Quinn certainly will pursue his long-standing populist agenda, pushing for constitutional amendments to allow voters to recall unpopular elected officials and to enact laws by initiative and referendum.

A longtime critic of pay-to-play, Quinn also is sure to propose tighter campaign finance rules, perhaps even a limit on contributions, and tougher ethics standards. And state workers are looking forward to Quinn's proposed "fumigation" of state government, anticipating the departure of what many see as a cadre of political hacks Blagojevich put in key positions, and an influx of critically needed front-line workers in such areas as human services and state prisons.

As governor, Quinn may have to accept the State Police executive security details that come with the job — a perk he declined as lieutenant governor — and he promised to live in the Executive Mansion in Springfield, which Blagojevich scarcely visited, to the annoyance of Capital City residents.

Symbolic gesture? Perhaps ... but a change of address Illinois citizens are widely applauding. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.*

## Coverage of Gov. Rod Blagojevich at *Illinois Issues* ONLINE

Link to past *Illinois Issues* articles about Blagojevich and others involved in the controversy:



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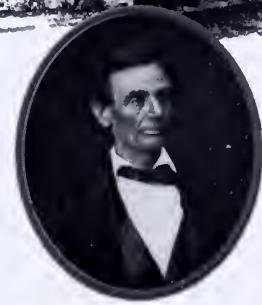
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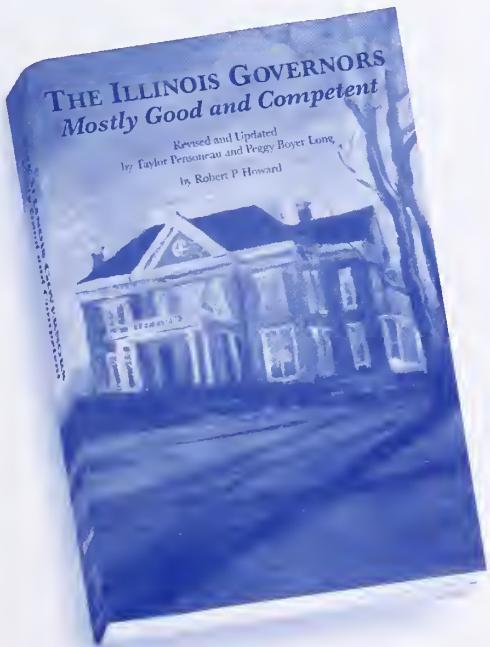
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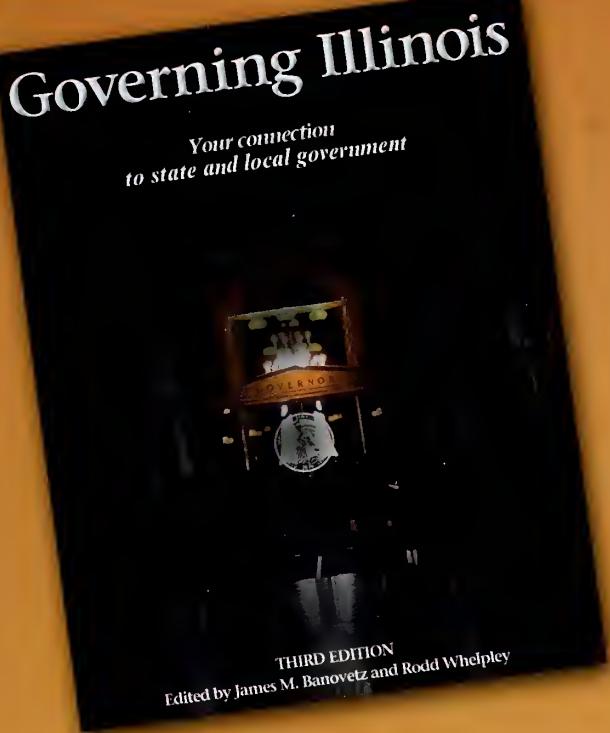
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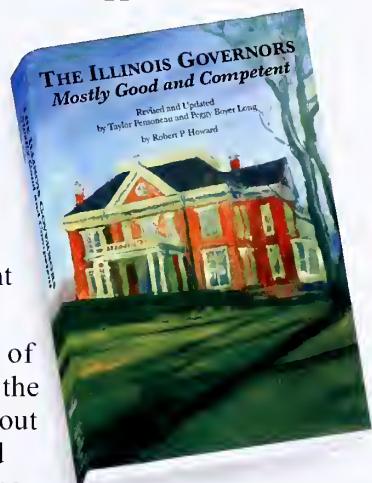
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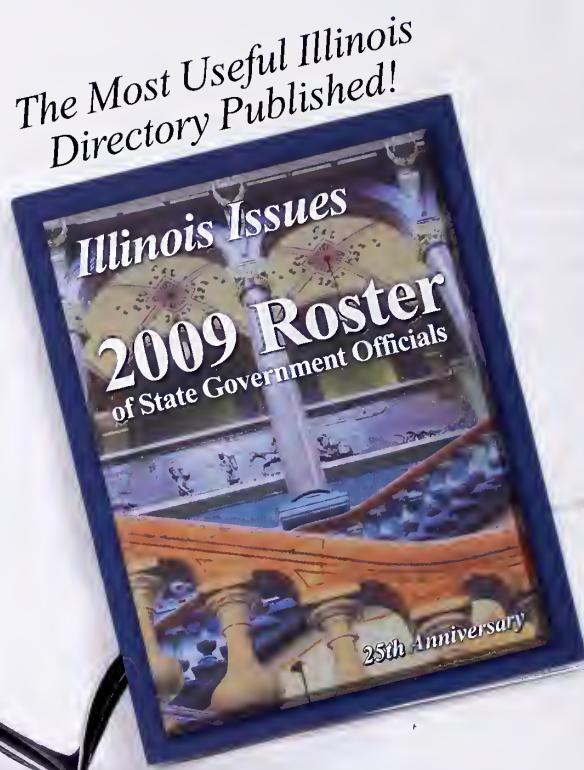
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